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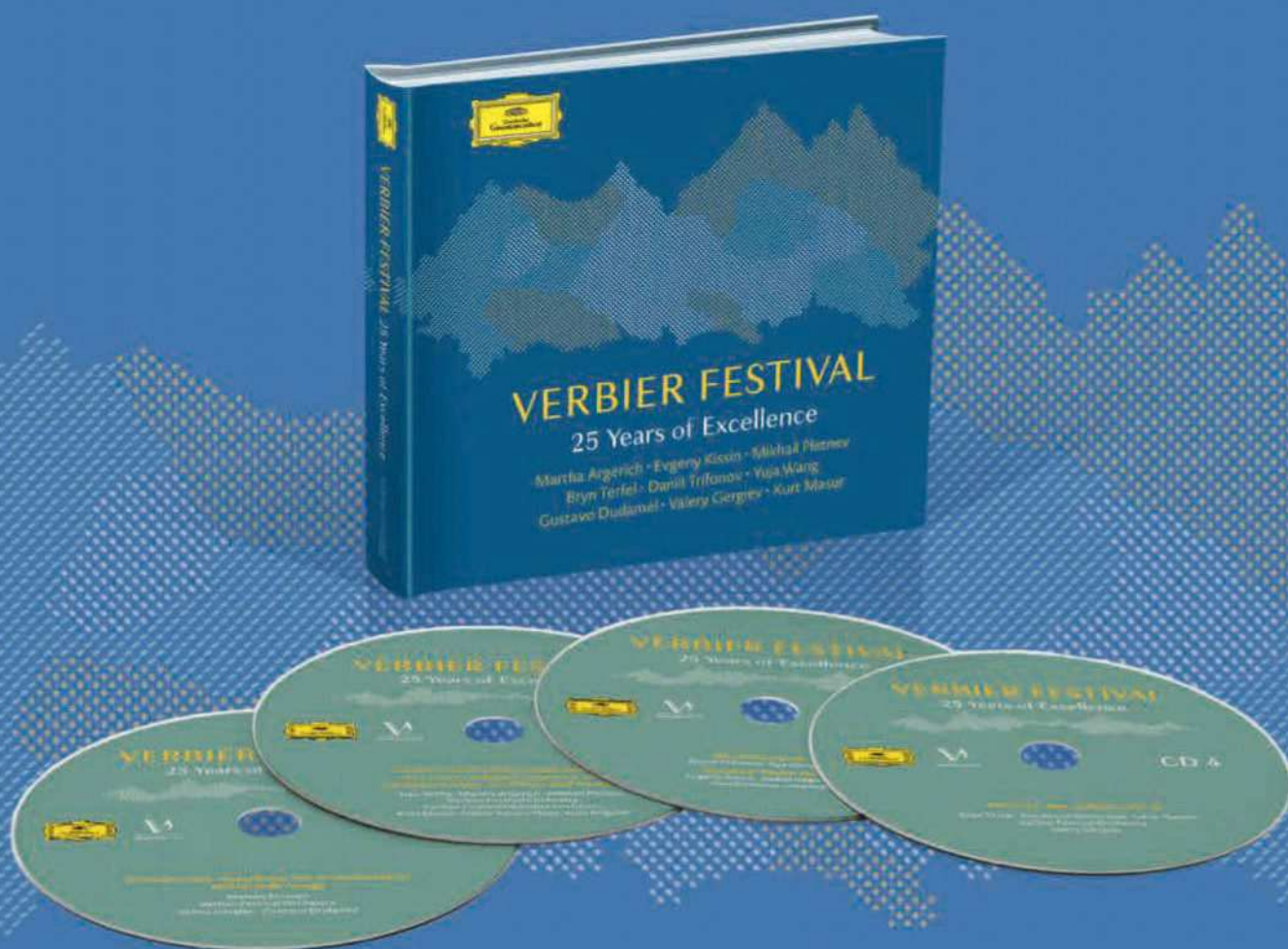
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US & CANADA SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

JL Adams

Everything That Rises

Jack Quartet

Cold Blue Music © CBO051 (56' • DDD)



Everything That Rises (2017) is John Luther Adams's fourth string quartet, following

close on the heels of *untouched* (2015). In a single unbroken movement, *Everything That Rises* is a satellite work from his huge choral-and-orchestral composition *Sila: The Breath of the World* (2014), constructed from a set of 'harmonic clouds' (to use the composer's term) common to both works. Like *Sila*, and indeed the vast majority of his output, the quartet draws inspiration from nature, especially that of the composer's native Alaska.

However, the expressive profile of *Everything That Rises* is very different from the earlier work, being essentially a vast, slow-moving spiral that moves, broadly, upwards in pitch from the opening cello pedal at a truly glacial pace. The harmonic language is neither tonal nor atonal, satisfying the requirements of the 'harmonic clouds' rather than traditional tonal structures, though to the innocent ear its unrelenting, droning dissonance may be challenging; there is nothing of the euphonious textures of, say, ... *and bells remembered* ... for chiming percussion (2005) or his orchestral tone poem *The Light that Fills the World* (1999–2000), nor the furious energy of the piano solo *Among Red Mountains* (2001).

The string quartet medium is traditionally one of dialogue between the four equal players but while there is a community of purpose in *Everything That Rises* I do not really hear the progress of the four independent lines as a dialogue, or even a discourse. The music is rather a phenomenon or force of nature, moving inexorably along its path with the listener relegated to a bystander. It does not make for comfortable listening, although it is mesmerising on its own terms. Nathaniel Reichman's recording is beautifully clear, with depth. **Guy Rickards**

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

Mikel Toms

The British conductor discusses his new recording of orchestral works by Douglas Knehan

How did you discover Knehan's music?

I first came across Douglas in his capacity as a record producer. He's always been incredibly generous and supportive of young and emerging composers and the focus was initially on recording their work, but it quickly became apparent that Douglas has a really impressive and original body of work of his own and that we needed to record some of it!

How would you characterise this music?

Much of Douglas's music is rooted in the natural world, particularly in the elemental forces that shape the planet. His works deal with, among other things, the movement of the atmosphere, the birth of continents, plate tectonics and ocean drift. At the same time, they occupy spaces that are easily recognisable to classical audiences: *Unfinished Earth* is a symphony, *Cascade* (about the movement of water) is a concerto for orchestra, *Tempest* (about the wind) is a flute concerto and *Drift* (the movement of



clouds) is a concerto for oboe and strings. So we have this idea of huge, fundamental forces being contained within classical forms, which sets up a really compelling dynamic. These pieces can sometimes feel like an almighty struggle to contain the uncontainable.

Does the scale of the writing reflect this?

It does – *Unfinished Earth* uses a vast orchestra and the orchestration is at times monumental. At other times, the focus is smaller-scale, on specific but immediately evocative sounds. It's exciting stuff!

Will you record more of Knehan's music?

We plan to record Douglas's Violin Concerto and Viola Concerto next – watch this space!

Berlioz

Grand Messe des morts (Requiem), Op 5
Robert McPherson ten **The Choral Arts Society of Washington; Virginia Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / JoAnn Falletta**

Hampton Roads © 011 (77' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Chrysler Hall, Norfolk, VA, May 2017

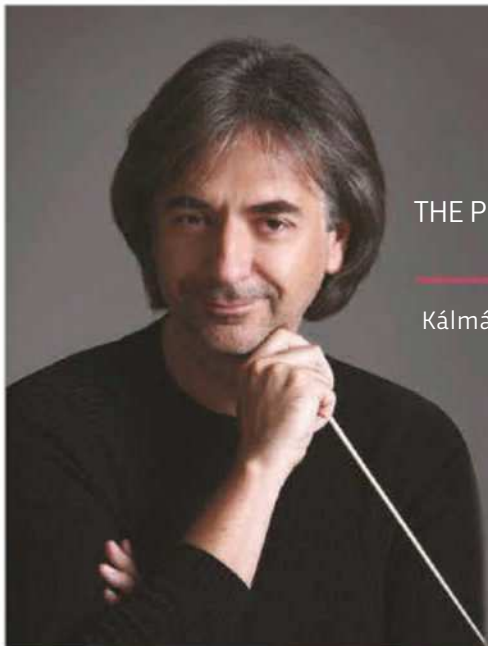


The ideal way to take in the wonders of the Berlioz

Requiem is to attend a performance in a concert hall or church, where the work's massive forces –

including four brass choirs strategically placed – can be heard in all their jolting and subtle glory. But the score also makes its transcendent impact felt via recording, as in this affecting and bold account under the baton of JoAnn Falletta. The performance was captured during a concert at the Virginia Arts Festival in May 2017 at Chrysler Hall in Norfolk featuring the Virginia Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, The Choral Arts Society of Washington and tenor Robert McPherson.

Falletta, the orchestra's music director, makes sure the score's fervent pages receive full, dramatic justice. When the brass choirs and timpani make their first



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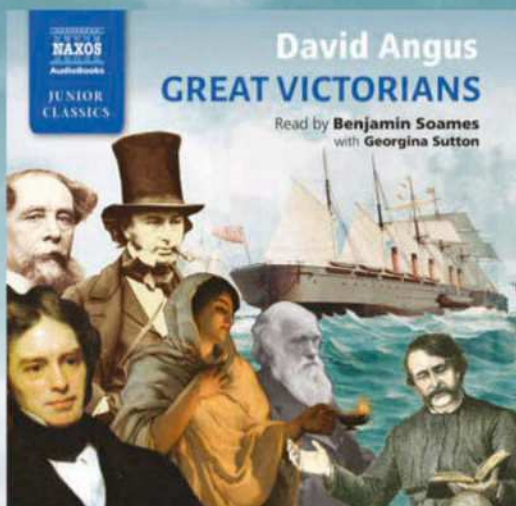
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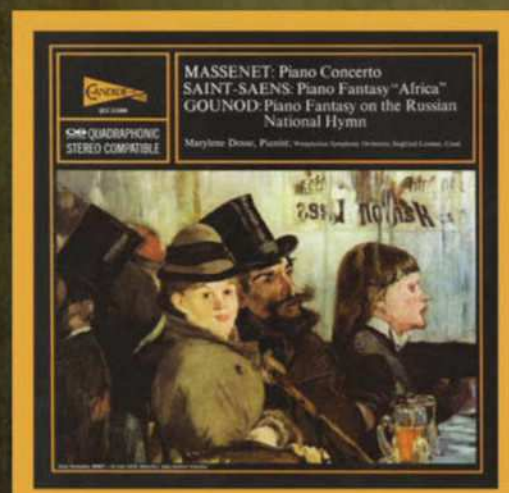
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Force of nature: the Jack Quartet give a mesmerising account of John Luther Adams's *Everything That Rises*

entrance in the 'Dies irae', you feel the earth tremble. Other moments throughout the Requiem receive similarly intense treatment. But what is most striking about the performance is Falletta's attention to Berlioz's reflective writing. The hushed passages in 'Quid sum miser' – tenors alternating with cor anglais and bassoons – are beautifully gauged. Elsewhere, as in the *a cappella* lines of 'Quaerens me', Falletta provides ample space for the choristers to convey the message of hope.

The interpretation is at once refined and sonorous, with the expanded Virginia Symphony making vivid contributions and the combined choruses expertly balanced and blended. McPherson sings the challenging tenor lines in the *Sanctus* with tender urgency. The audience in Chrysler Hall gives the performers a rousing reception at the end. Anyone listening via speakers and ear buds might be tempted to do the same.

Donald Rosenberg

Buch

From the River Flow the Stars No 6.
Acanthus Leaves No 6. Life and Opinions No 7.
Landscapes No 1. Maze of Infinite Forms No 1
Daedalus Quartet
MSR Classics © MS1681 (55' • DDD)



A cursory glance at the titles of these string quartets – all part of larger compositional

series – might suggest a composer of Segerstamic sensitivities. That is not the case with Brian Buch (b1984), his titles reflecting, rather, his music's diverse sources of inspiration. Thus, as might be inferred from a title Takemitsu could have chosen (but without a number), *From the River Flow the Stars* No 6 derives from a poem of Kokin Wakashū (aka Kokinshū). This neatly constructed and appealing triptych, slow-slower-fast, catches the air of the poem very nicely.

There is a good deal of somewhat knottier writing in the other quartets featured here, not least *Acanthus Leaves* No 6 and *Life and Opinions* No 7 – the latter containing the tersest writing on offer – both of which derive from ETA Hoffmann's novel *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*. I cannot help feeling that Hoffmann would not have recognised Murr's 'wonderful and ineffable thoughts' from Buch's interpretations of them, but it must be said that in abstract they make ineffable musical sense and are virtuosically rendered

here by the Daedalus Quartet. Likewise in *Landscape* No 1, a triptych inspired by Čiurlionis's paintings – not music.

It is ironic that the shortest work here – the only one under 10 minutes' duration – is *Maze of Infinite Forms* No 1. A diptych of slow movements, the first edgy, the second only intermittently so, its inspiration derives from Tagore's poems, the resulting 'maze of thematic material ... providing a cohesive story of ever-changing direction'. I am not convinced; the music sounds rather aimless, as if lost in its own, quite finite, maze. **Guy Rickards**

Haydn

'Sonatas, Vol 2'
Piano Sonatas, HobXVI -
No 37; No 39; No 46; No 48
Anne-Marie McDermott pf
Bridge © BRIDGE9497 (69' • DDD)



Anne-Marie McDermott's second release for Bridge devoted to Haydn

further testifies to her masterful affinity for the composer's style, as well as her ability to convey a specific character for every movement in each work. She does so by

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Pianistic poise: Jooyoung Kim plays Haydn, Liszt and Rachmaninov

fusing pianistic sophistication and expressive economy, meaning that her diverse portfolio of articulations and shadings draw attention to the music first and foremost.

In the opening *Andante* of the two-movement C major Sonata (No 48), McDermott scrutinises Haydn's *espressione* directive with a purposeful force that differs from the lyrically orientated norm. Instead of rounding off phrases, McDermott may accent a final note for emphasis, change dynamics when reiterating a melody or point up an accompaniment that usually recedes into a fuzzy background. Her slight accelerations within the Rondo's main theme impart a gruff angularity to the music that proves both unusual and convincing. McDermott's scales and embellishments in the *Allegro* con brio of the G major (No 39) are sharpened to a fault, whereas comparably pinpoint precision better suits the *Prestissimo*'s lilting wit.

The pianist's terse and impeccably controlled *Allegro* first movement of the A flat Sonata (No 46) radically differs from Emanuel Ax's multi-hued tenderness (Sony Classical, 10/03), although her disembodied deliberation in the *Adagio* equals and sometimes surpasses that of Sviatoslav Richter's late-period Decca and Live Classics recordings (for better or worse, McDermott and Richter observe both *Adagio* repeats). However, Ax's lighter legato touch wins out in the *Presto* finale. The *Allegro con brio* of the D major Sonata (No 37), assigned to thousands of piano

students each week, emerges newly minted via McDermott's firmly centred rhythm, impeccable balances and sparkling poise. In the *Largo*, McDermott wrings *Sturm und Drang* and anguished intensity from every bar. I don't know if she's channelling Beethoven or Billie Holiday, but it's a pretty harrowing interpretation. More Haydn from McDermott, please! **Jed Distler**

Haydn • Liszt • Rachmaninov

Haydn Piano Sonata, HobXVI:48 Liszt Grandes études de Paganini, S141 Rachmaninov Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op 42

Jooyoung Kim *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1636 (57' • DDD)



music collaborations and teaching credits mentioned in the biography included with Jooyoung Kim's Haydn, Rachmaninov and Liszt recital. The back cover gives no information about what sounds like an unusually responsive and vibrant concert grand, except that Christoph Thompson's production values do the instrument sonic justice, not to mention Kim's undisputable pianistic poise and warm, focused sonority.

Kim's interpretative virtues, however, are open to debate. Her literal, faceless account of Haydn's wonderful two-movement

C major Sonata abounds with square, cookie-cutter phrasing and predictably accented down-beats. Her heavy-gaited *Presto* Rondo reveals neither the lightness, the wit nor the sense of surprise one hears from Brendel, Hamelin and Horowitz.

Likewise, Kim's control of the Rachmaninov *Corelli* Variations' chordal leaps, vertiginous passagework and often gnarly textures cannot be faulted. Yet she often flattens out the music's contrasts in mood and character, while paying little attention to the harmonic felicities and contrapuntal interest. For example, the second variation's *leggiere* writing generally transpires on a uniform level, in contrast to, say, Nareh Arghamanyan's far more nuanced reading (Pentatone, 10/12). The rhythmic variety and cumulative progression of Vars 5, 6 and 7 are nowhere to be found as Kim pounds these variations out. She dispatches Var 12's obsessive phrases too uniformly and neutrally to be truly *agitato*, although the central Intermezzo's cadenza-like writing at least conveys a modicum of fantasy.

In Liszt's *Paganini* Études, Kim revels in No 1's busy tremolos without paying heed to the long lines that Goran Filipec shapes so imaginatively in his recent recording (Naxos, 6/16). No 2 begins promisingly, yet Kim's playing grows thicker and blander as the piece progresses. Her prosaic accounts of Nos 3, 4 and 5 come nowhere near the suppleness and characterful spark generated by Hamelin, Trifonov or, best of all, the underrated George-Emmanuel

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Pictured: Cecilia Bartoli (Decca/© Uli Weber/St Petersburg 2014) who featured on the November 2014 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$136.50; print only annual subscription, Digital Edition and reviews Database (\$94); Digital Club (\$130); Gramophone Club (\$168). Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders. Overseas subscription p&p: Europe \$28.99 Rest of World \$35.75. If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com



Lazaridis (Linn, 10/06). But who wrote the excellent booklet notes? No one seems to be credited. **Jed Distler**

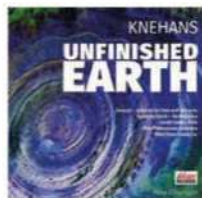
Knehan

Flute Concerto, 'Tempest'. Unfinished Earth

^aGareth Davies //

Brno Philharmonic Orchestra / Mikel Toms

Ablaze Ⓢ AR00036 (53' • DDD)



There are many really fine American composers for orchestra at the moment, though few have the international presence of, say, Corigliano, Christopher Rouse, Joan Tower, Jennifer Higdon or – at least in the opera pit – Jake Heggie. Composers like Dan Welcher, Jeremy Gill and Behzad Ranjbaran (to pluck three names at random) deserve wider currency. So, too, does Douglas Knehan (*b*1957), a name unknown to me hitherto (although I see Presto Classical's database now lists eight other discs featuring his music which are currently available).

There is no doubt from the two works given here that Knehan is a composer of considerable fluency and instrumental imagination. The three movements of the Flute Concerto (2014) portray three winds that blow off the Mediterranean Sea: 'Ostra', 'Mistral ... Funerailles' (no specific references to Liszt that I can hear) and 'Etesian'. The outer movements are the most vivid while the central evocation of the Mistral strikes as a little more generic. It is played with impressive control by Gareth Davies, whose attractive tone is evident throughout.

Knehan describes his orchestral triptych *Unfinished Earth* (2016) as 'a symphony in all but name' and there is a clear community of spirit and emotional progression through the work. The inspiration lies in the tectonic and geographic features of the planet, anthropomorphised to reflect human experience. Thus, the opening 'Tempering' reflects both the formation of Earth and 'the interplay between individual and group'; 'Eternal Ocean' needs no poetic explanation; while 'Tearing Drift' – a terrific toccata – provides a roof-raising conclusion. The Brno Philharmonic give a storming account, relishing Knehan's virtuosic writing, particularly the horns (the composer's son being an apprentice horn player). However, Mikel Toms secures some sensitive accompaniment in the concerto. Good sound, too. **Guy Rickards**

Stravinsky

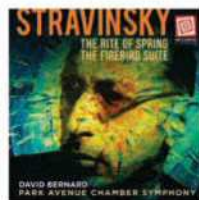
The Rite of Spring^a. The Firebird – Suite (1919)

Park Avenue Chamber Symphony Orchestra /

David Bernard

Recursive Classics Ⓢ RC2058479 (56' • DDD)

^aFrom RC2057001 (A/16)



There was a time when *The Rite of Spring* put an orchestra through its paces, and the palpable effort of 100 or so highly trained musicians negotiating its jagged rhythms and metric twists often added an extra layer of excitement – something like the squeak of chalked hands on wooden bars when watching gymnastics. It's why I still find Ernest Ansermet's rough-edged 1950 recording with the Suisse Romande Orchestra (Decca, 5/13) so gripping. Over the years, however, the score's once fearsome technical hurdles became child's play – literally, as the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain demonstrated in a landmark 1977 recording with Simon Rattle (also Decca, 5/13).

The Park Avenue Chamber Symphony is not a professional orchestra; its members are bankers and doctors, not full-time musicians. That they play *The Rite* so well is perhaps not so surprising these days but is impressive nonetheless. There's audible strain, certainly: unsteady ensemble in some passages and iffy intonation in others (particularly from the solo strings). Some sections are nicely done. The 'Ritual of Abduction' has a desperate energy, for example, and I like the aptly primal sounds of the winds and brass in 'The Procession of the Sage'. But, in general, conductor David Bernard errs on the side of caution. Both the 'Dance of the Earth' at the end of part 1 and the final 'Sacrificial Dance' require far greater urgency and abandon.

This recording of *The Rite* was issued in 2016, coupled with Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra. It's reissued here with a newly recorded account of the 1919 *Firebird* Suite – like *The Rite*, in a new, corrected edition. While *The Firebird* is less fraught with rhythmic and metric peril than *The Rite*, it requires a luxuriousness and finesse that the PACS can't quite manage. There are some delightfully sinuous woodwind solos in 'The Princesses' Round Dance' but 'Kashchei's Infernal Dance' and the finale feel somewhat tentative; there's insufficient sense of danger in the former or exultation in the latter.

For a more satisfying example of the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony's music-

making, give a listen to their heartfelt recording of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony (Recursive, 4/18).

Andrew Farach-Colton

'We, Like Salangan Swallows ...'

'A Choral Gallery'

E Brown Small Pieces for Large Chorus Burt

Elegy Carl The City Feldman Chorus and Instruments. The Swallows of Salangan. Voices and Instruments 1. Voices and Instruments 2

W Ogdon Three Statements Oliveros Sound Patterns

The Astra Choir / John McCaughey

New World Ⓢ NW80794-2 (76' • DDD • T)



This panorama of visionary sound and process from Morton Feldman and

contemporaries covers a period in American music when Feldman, John Cage and Earle Brown were throwing off classical music's shackles. Performed with passion and flair by an ensemble in Melbourne, this anthology showcases the movement's form of cosmic romanticism – cosmic in its conscious deliberation, romantic in the rhapsodic quality of its voice.

Feldman's own music additionally underlines his commitment to unique sounds. *The Swallows of Salangan*, based on Boris Pasternak's reference to mythic birds that helped build the world, uses five flutes, seven cellos, five trumpets, two tubas, two pianos and two vibraphones. His *Voices and Instruments 1* shakes the room with primeval sounds produced by five woodwinds, horn, double bass, timpani and piano.

Feldman's glacial seriousness contrasts with the more energised if simpler delights of Pauline Oliveros's *Sound Patterns* and the tour de force miracles of Brown's *Small Pieces for Large Chorus*. Worthy contributions by less often heard voices include Warren Burt's moving *Elegy* and Robert Carl's *The City*, set to words by the Chicago architect Louis Sullivan.

The Astra Choir, who sing as if the music had been written for them, were formed in 1951 as a string orchestra of women musicians under Asta Flack, a violinist and conductor who had migrated to Australia from Lithuania. John McCaughey, their director of 40 years, contributes 21 pages of indispensable booklet notes and an admission that, with Feldman's scores, 'the performer is often left wondering what to do, aside from playing softly!' **Laurence Vittes**



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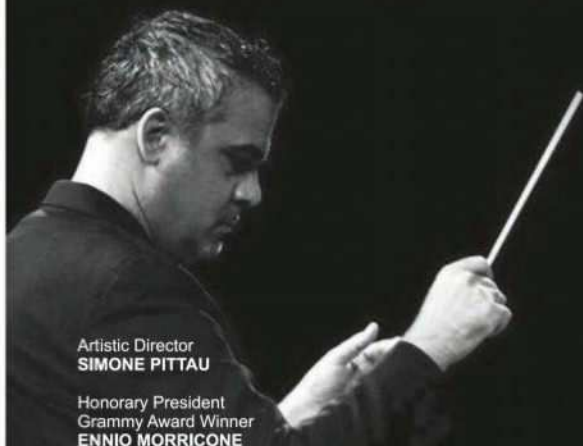


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Musical meeting points and storytelling

Each year, around this time, members of the *Gramophone* team head to the Classical:NEXT conference in Rotterdam. The conference – partly trade fair, partly a series of talks and performances – is an excellent opportunity to take stock of trends, of the challenges facing the music world and how they're being surmounted, and to talk to so many of the innovative indie labels about their plans. This year, 1300 delegates from 48 countries gathered and the overall impression, I'm delighted to report, was one of positivity and optimism. I covered some of the reasons for this optimism last month, following reports from record industry trade bodies about the growth in digital and streaming revenue. Many people I spoke to had good stories to share which backed up some of those statistics. There was also, as we predicted at the start of this year, much talk about smart speakers, which will play on demand whatever you ask; there's clearly a strong desire to perfect that technology.

But another theme that cropped up several times was something else we've explored in our pages, and that's the mingling of music at meeting points. Meeting points of genre, or of traditions, or of technology. During the conference I saw a showcase by pianist Belle Chen in which light, sampled sound and scent were employed to enrich an already evocative experience; another in which music for the African kora was transcribed brilliantly for guitar by Derek Gripper. It's a theme which can also be found in this issue of *Gramophone*. Our cover story explores percussion music: is there another instrument family



Martin

for which the relationship between classical music and other traditions is closer? When so much is about the beat – in both senses – it renders divisions based on matters such as key and notation much less relevant. As the feature's headline puts it, percussion is about 'listening to the world'. And if one of its leading soloists – Martin Grubinger – can appear on the stage of both Carnegie Hall and the Eurovision Song Contest, and feel perfectly at home on each, then percussion has clearly found a way of reaching out to audiences far and wide.

The notion of musics meeting is also an idea explored in this month's My Music by folk singer Sam Lee, a questing artist who through his song collecting work walks in a path pioneered by the likes of Percy Grainger and Ralph Vaughan Williams in understanding and absorbing other traditions. But he also puts beautifully a further point about rethinking the musical experience, and that's the issue of how artists interact with audiences and talk to them about the music they're about to hear – something both the showcase artists mentioned earlier did well. Audiences want to hear stories, he suggests. People new to classical music don't want to know about, and are not going to be engaged by, complex musical analysis (not initially, at least), a point too often forgotten. What they want to know, suggests Lee, is: 'Why is that musician in love with this music, why have they devoted their life to making it?' Ultimately, one hopes, that will come across in the power of the performance of course – but a few anecdotes first can't do any harm.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'When you delve into the world of percussion, you realise that it's not so much a

world as a universe,' says **ANDREW MELLOR**, who writes this month's cover story. 'We are only starting to see the full force of its influence on so-called classical music.'



'What struck me most', reflects **RICHARD LAWRENCE**, author of this month's feature on

Opera Rara, 'was the sheer dedication and enthusiasm of everyone concerned. Opera Rara's achievement in the meticulous preparation of little-known 19th-century operas is outstanding.'



'I wondered whether listening to multiple versions of this old friend might spoil our relationship,'

muses **JEREMY NICHOLAS**, who writes this issue's Collection on Mendelssohn's G minor Piano Concerto. 'But far from it. I've ended up even fonder of this magical work than I was before.'

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Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



'MOZART IN LONDON'
The Mozartists / Ian Page
Signum
► **DAVID VICKERS'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 38**

A wonderful exploration of the musical life of London during Mozart's visit as an eight year old, all beautifully and engagingly performed by Ian Page and his Mozartists. A true delight!



MAHLER
Symphony No 5
Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra / Adam Fischer
AVI Music

This Mahler cycle

is shaping up to be very fine indeed; this Fifth has all the hallmarks we've already witnessed from Adam Fischer of brilliant music-making.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



PETTERSSON
Symphonies Nos 5 & 7
Norrköping Symphony Orchestra / Christian Lindberg
BIS

These two Allan Pettersson symphonies are given powerful advocacy, the urgency of the Seventh palpable, the music, as Guy Rickards puts it, in the musicians' blood.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**

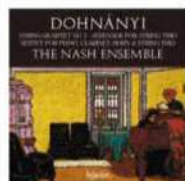


RACHMANINOV
Piano Concerto No 3.
'Corelli' Variations
Boris Giltburg *pf* Royal Scottish National Orchestra /

Carlos Miguel Prieto Naxos

A fiendish but fabulous piano concerto performed with a glorious blend of technical prowess and lyricism.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



DOHNÁNYI
Chamber Works
The Nash Ensemble
Hyperion
A superb set of Dohnányi's chamber

music from The Nash Ensemble, which Andrew Farach-Colton rightly suggests should both win over discoverers, and please aficionados of his music.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



'STEPHEN HOUGH'S DREAM ALBUM'
Stephen Hough *pf*
Hyperion
A personal programme – both

in terms of content, but also delivery – which charms, engages and fascinates, and highlights again just what a gifted and rounded musician Stephen Hough is.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**



DUFAY
'The Dufay Spectacle'
Gothic Voices
Linn
Voices and instruments alike

swiftly entice the listener with their excellence and evocative atmosphere, Gothic Voices magnificently transporting us to their 15th-century sound world.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



'CHIMÈRE'
Sandrine Piau *sop*
Susan Manoff *pf*
Alpha
Brilliantly and compellingly

communicative as ever, Sandrine Piau's latest recital draws on an eclectic series of songs, and again benefits from a wonderful rapport with Susan Manoff.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



'A ROSE MAGNIFICAT'
Gabrieli Consort / Paul McCreesh
Signum
This album contains some deeply moving

singing, of music both ancient and modern – a well-crafted journey leading to the exquisitely performed contemporary title track from Matthew Martin.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



'SIFACE'
'L'amor castrato'
Filippo Mineccia
countertenor Nereydas / Javier Ulises Illán
Glossa

A cleverly compiled programme delves into the life of 17th-century castrato Siface, but it's the singing from Filippo Mineccia which makes this so enjoyable.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 97**



DVD/BLU-RAY
DONIZETTI Il borgomastro di Saardam
Sols; Donizetti Opera Chorus and Orchestra / Roberto Rizzi Brignoli
Dynamic

'Great fun,' says Richard Lawrence, offering his nod of approval to this Donizetti rarity from Bergamo's Festival devoted to the music of the composer.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
'NORMA FISHER AT THE BBC, Vol 1'
Norma Fisher *pf*
Sonetto Classics

Acclaimed today as a teacher, it's now possible to hear on record Norma Fisher's great gifts as a performer.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at **qobuz.com**

FOR THE RECORD

Decca announces a trio of new artist signings

Decca announced three signings this month, refreshing its line-up of young artists with a saxophonist, a soprano and a composer.

The Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen's Decca debut will include Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* and arias from *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. She first earned wide awareness in 2015 when she was named joint winner of Plácido Domingo's Operalia competition. Major opera house appearances have followed, including the title role in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Glyndebourne Festival and Wiener Staatsoper, while this year will see her Covent Garden debut in Wagner's *Ring*. Since her competition success, Davidsen has appeared in our pages on a Dacapo disc of Danish composer John Frandsen's songs, and more recently – in January 2018 – on a Grieg disc from Edward Gardner and the Bergen Philharmonic on Chandos, featuring the *Peer Gynt* incidental music, both reviews prompting positive comments about her contribution.



Decca's new trio: Rebecca Dale, Jess Gillam and Lise Davidsen

Also joining Decca is 19-year-old British saxophonist Jess Gillam. Her debut album will be recorded later this year, though another major highlight this year will include the Last Night of the Proms, at which she'll play Milhaud's *Scaramouche*. Gillam also appeared on the Proms stage last year, and in 2016 had won the woodwind final of the BBC Young Musician – the first saxophonist to have reached the concerto final.

Completing the trio is the composer Rebecca Dale – another Decca first, Dale being the first female composer to be signed to the label. Her debut album, featuring her Requiem, will be out later this year. It's a joint deal with the newly launched Decca Publishing. With a background in both concert-hall and film music, Dale's music has already appeared on Decca – her title-track contribution to Voces8's 'Winter' album prompted Malcolm Riley, reviewing in our December 2016 issue, to write 'this warming masterpiece will definitely see me through any hivernal hardship'.

Daniel Hyde is the new Music Director at King's, Cambridge

Daniel Hyde will succeed Stephen Cleobury in one of the world's highest profile choral posts. The conductor and organist will take up the post of Director of Music of King's College in October 2019.

Cleobury announced that he was retiring from the position – which he had held since 1982 – sparking speculation about a succession. Aside from singing daily services in the chapel, the choir have been prolific recording artists over many years, most recently releasing albums on its own label, launched in 2012. Meanwhile, the annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols reaches audiences of millions both on radio and television.

It will actually be a return to King's for Hyde, who was an organ scholar there. Subsequent posts have included directing the choirs of Jesus College, Cambridge and Magdalen College, Oxford, though, since 2016, Hyde has served as Organist and Director of Music at St Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, New York.

'In nurturing and developing the minds and talents of many future generations of choristers and students at King's,' he said, 'I hope I will succeed in sustaining the music of the daily services and bringing the College's music-making to an ever-increasing audience. It's a daunting task, and it is one that I shall relish.'



Maxim Emelyanychev to head Scottish Chamber Orchestra

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra has revealed its next Principal Conductor: the 29-year-old Russian Maxim Emelyanychev.

He's best known for his thrilling work with the Baroque orchestra Il Pomo d'Oro, whose achievements include a *Gramophone* Award for their recent collaboration with Joyce DiDonato, 'In War and Peace', on Erato, and more recently, in March this year, an Editor's Choice for their DG recording of Handel arias with countertenor Franco Fagioli.

He will take up his post with the SCO in September next year. This March he had stepped in at short notice to conduct the orchestra in Schubert's *Great C* major Symphony, a performance which clearly made an impression on the players of the SCO, prompting the orchestra's Principal Cellist Philip Higham to say that 'his immediate, sensitive, focused way of working – including very particular attention to phrasing, dynamics and style – quickly led to the orchestra listening and rehearsing like the finest chamber group (that is a special feeling in an orchestra!).'

Emelyanychev was also struck by what he felt to be a strong and swiftly established rapport with the orchestra. 'It is very exceptional to feel such a free collaboration with an orchestra at such high level of attention from the beginning of the first rehearsal! It is inspiring and I feel honoured to create music with these extraordinary musicians!'



Nina Stemme receives Nilsson Prize

The Swedish soprano Nina Stemme has been awarded the Birgit Nilsson Prize, a \$1m gift awarded every three years from a foundation left by the great 20th-century opera star.

To honour Stemme with Nilsson's legacy feels highly appropriate: in the May issue of *Gramophone*, in our cover story devoted to marking Nilsson's centenary, Mike Ashman describes Stemme, one of today's most celebrated Wagner singers, as the 'successor to Nilsson today in many of her leading roles'.

The Birgit Nilsson Prize is classical music's largest monetary award, and Nilsson's instructions were that it should be given to a world-leading artist or organization currently performing. The recipient, says the Foundation, should have 'added a chapter to music history and



Birgit Nilsson and Nina Stemme in 1996

their contributions can be expected to stand the test of time'.

'It is a great honour to be recognized for my work,' said Stemme, 'but it is even greater to be recognized in my home country

by a world-renowned organization that bears the name and carries the legacy of a legend ... my idol Birgit Nilsson.' She continues to feel that Nilsson is inspiring her 'in the background with her immense power and persona'.

Stemme is the fourth recipient of the Prize: the first, chosen by Nilsson herself, was Plácido Domingo; he was followed by Riccardo Muti and the Vienna Philharmonic. The Prize Award Ceremony will take place on October 11 at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm, Sweden, and be presented by King Carl XVI Gustaf.

ONE TO WATCH

Jiyeon Lee Violin

The violinist Jiyeon Lee has a pretty formidable champion in one of today's leading virtuosos, Nikolaj Znaider. It was he who was President of the Jury of the Carl Nielsen Violin Competition when Jiyeon Lee was named first prize winner in 2016. Reflecting on that competition, Znaider recalls: 'When you sit on a jury you are looking for somebody who makes you forget that it is a competition and I remember very clearly hearing Jiyeon play for the first time in 2016 and she did just that. Her playing was immediately a breath of fresh air. She is a terrific violinist and I can see her going very far. She has lightness in her playing and yet is a musician who takes her craft very seriously.' He's since invited her to perform as soloist in concerts that he has conducted.

That's some compelling advocacy, and *Gramophone* readers will be able to hear her for themselves as Lee has now released the Nielsen Violin Concerto, which she performed at the competition, on Orchid Classics, pairing it with Korngold's Violin Concerto.

The 26-year-old violinist was born in South Korea and studied at the Korean National



University of Arts in Seoul, before moving to Berlin to continue her studies. And it's in that city where she has just been named as the youngest ever concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Berlin. Adding to these different elements of her music-making, she is also a committed chamber musician, and in fact her next disc will feature works by Szymanowski, Stravinsky, Bartók, Ravel and Wieniawski with the pianist Henry Kramer, on the Champs Hill label. It will be fascinating to see how this multifaceted musician's career develops.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

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Podcasts

This month on the *Gramophone* Podcast, we catch-up with pianist Angela Hewitt to discuss the different dimensions of her work, including marking her 60th birthday by performing Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, her latest addition to her Hyperion series of Beethoven piano sonatas, and her forthcoming Prom's performance of Messiaen's *Turangallila-Symphonie*.



Listen to Michael Collins on the Gramophone Podcast

Also this month, James Jolly meets the clarinettist and conductor Michael Collins whose recording of Crusell's clarinet concertos with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra for Chandos was the Recording of the Month in the June issue. Unusually, Collins led that recording from the clarinet, in so demonstrating his extraordinary technical skill and musicality.

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ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Bolette Roed on her recorder by Fred Morgan



The instrument has a lowest note D, and so in terms of size sits between the alto in F and the tenor in C. It was around in Baroque times, and was especially in use when playing repertoire written for the traverso flute (also a D-instrument). We know of a significant number of surviving originals by various woodwind instrument makers, including Peter Bressan, one of the main makers of recorders. My instrument is based on the Bressan original, in combination with a model by Thomas Stanesby, another famous maker.

I think the voice flute has an amazing soothing ability. The warm sound to me brings a sense of calmness. This specific instrument is made of boxwood, which was a very common choice of wood in the Baroque times – we also know that maple was often used. Recorders can also be made from harder woods like granadilla, which give a quite different sound. You can almost imagine granadilla being this very dark and dense wood, whereas the boxwood is a softer type of wood, but still compressed, still strong in its construction – this gives for me the perfect blend of a warm and yet focused tone. If you go towards the other direction of even softer woods, like fruit trees, such as pear or plum, you get a sound which is more malleable, less concrete and a bit more diffuse. It's amazing how much the choice of wood influences the sound.

Every instrument is a very personal choice: you grow somehow together with the instrument and you have a different approach to playing each one of them. Each recorder has its own unique personality, so depending on what I'm playing I know which instrument I prefer because of the sound and atmosphere it creates.”

Bolette Roed's Bach Suites recording is released by Ondine on June 15

“The instrument I've recorded the Bach Suites on is a Fred Morgan voice flute in D, A415. It's one of my best instruments as it features a deep, warm tone and remarkably clear, high register. One of the main challenges with recorders is a compromise between a powerful lower register, and clarity or responsiveness towards the higher end of the spectrum. The famous Australian recorder maker, Fred Morgan, was masterly in finding the optimal balance in his

instruments – the low register is always powerful and audible, while the highest notes still remain remarkably clear and flexible. In my view, it was the perfect instrument on which to record this part of the Bach repertoire. The alto recorder didn't offer the same level of warmth reminiscent of the cello, for which the Suites were originally written. I had to make a conscious decision to stray away from the original key in order to get the colour and sound I wanted.

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO *Prelude*

Tim Parry continues our series tracing the development of different musical forms



The opening C major Prelude from Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier

A Prelude is a piece of music that traditionally leads into something else, common examples from the Baroque period being a fugue or a suite of dances. Since the early 19th century a Prelude has more generally indicated a short character piece, often with an improvisatory quality.

The first notated preludes were organ pieces played to introduce church music. By the 17th century preludes commenced suites of dances in the same key, with examples by Couperin, Rameau, d'Anglebert and JS Bach (the *English Suites* and *Cello Suites*, for example). Bach also followed Pachelbel's precedent in pairing preludes with fugues, both in organ works and in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, where two books of preludes and fugues each encompass all the major and minor tonalities.

Building on Bach's example, sets of preludes covering the 24 major and minor keys became commonplace in the early 19th century. These developed alongside the performing tradition of 'preluding', where pianists improvised a brief introduction – an opportunity to warm up, familiarise oneself with the instrument and become creatively engaged. Most composers were performing musicians, and many wrote examples of such preludes covering each key, so that non-improvising pianists could choose a prelude appropriate to what they were about to play. Examples of preludes written for this purpose include sets by Hummel, Cramer, Kalkbrenner and Moscheles. These rarely go beyond brief finger-loosening exercises designed to establish a key. When Chopin came to write his set of 24 Preludes, Op 28 (1838-39), as so often he developed an existing form, elevating it to a new level of poetic richness and independence.

In turn, Chopin's Preludes were the model for subsequent sets by Heller, Alkan, Cui and Busoni, and in the early 20th century by Rachmaninov and Shostakovich. Debussy's 24 Preludes, in two books, are each appended with poetic titles, and the genre was consolidated as a kind of miniature tone poem. Inspired by Bach, Shostakovich later reunited preludes with fugues for his Op 87 (1950-51), once more taking in all 24 keys in a cycle of fifths. ⑥

► Listen to our Prelude playlist on Qobuz

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRONICLE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

OPUS ARTE

NEW RELEASES



IL TROVATORE
VERDI
Royal Opera House

German director David Bösch, celebrated for his theatrical productions for Munich and Frankfurt among others, makes his UK debut with this new production for The Royal Opera. The opera's themes of jealousy, revenge and love play out against a hauntingly beautiful, wintry landscape that has been riven by war.

DVD | BLU-RAY



HAMLET
DEAN
Glyndebourne

Brett Dean's colourful, energetic, witty and richly lyrical music expertly captures the modernity of Shakespeare's timeless tale, while also exploiting the traditional operatic elements of arias, ensembles and choruses. The artists include Allan Clayton, Sarah Connolly and Barbara Hannigan, conducted by Vladimir Jurowski.

DVD | BLU-RAY



DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER
WAGNER
Bayreuth Festival

'The excellent Mr Youn...sings with dignity touched with anguish...Merbeth...brings a big, penetrating voice to the role...Selig is a powerhouse Daland...Thielemann...drew pulsing, dynamic and transparent playing from the Orchestra.' New York Times.

2 CD SET



TANNHÄUSER
WAGNER
Bayreuth Festival

'Kober's conducting...is outstanding and the chorus are superb...The colour that Nyland is able to apply...pays dividends with Elisabeth...Musically it's a glorious affair...that finds the true delicacy and poignancy within what is surely the most Romantic of Wagner's works on the misunderstood, suffering, exiled artist.' OperaJournal.

3 CD SET

opusarte.com

IN THE STUDIO

● The soprano **Helena Juntunen** and *Gramophone's* 2016 Young Artist, the baritone **Benjamin Appl**, were joined by the **Lund University Male Voice Choir** (Lunds Studentsångare) to record Sibelius's *Kullervo* with the **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra** and its conductor **Thomas Dausgaard**. The sessions took place at Glasgow City Halls, and the release, on Hyperion, has been set for May 2019.

● The Australian soprano **Kate Macoboy** and lutenist **Robert Meunier** recently recorded Italian Renaissance songs and lute solos for Etcetera Records. Repertoire included songs by Tromboncino and Cara that set the poetry of their contemporaries Petrarch, Jacopo Sannazaro and Michelangelo, plus lute solos by Francesco da Milano. The recording was made at St Martin's, East Woodhay, Hampshire and is due for release in the summer.

● June was a busy month for BIS, with a trio of recordings taking place in Norway, the US and Germany. First up was **Thomas Dausgaard** and the **Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra**, who recorded Bruckner's Sixth Symphony. At the same time, **Osmo Vänskä** was in Minneapolis with his **Minnesota Orchestra** joined by the soprano **Carolyn Sampson** for

Mahler's Fourth. And finally, **Trio Zimmermann** were at the St Osdag-Kirche in Neustadt-Mandelsloh to continue their recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Release dates are yet to be confirmed.

● Marimba player **She-e Wu** was in Kankaanpää, Finland, recording an album with the **Osuma Ensemble**. Comprising five percussionists, the Finnish ensemble accompanied Wu in music by Lou Harrison, John Cage, Henry Cowell and Timothy Ferchen, as well as in a piece by Wu herself. The recording is due for release on Alba Records in the autumn.

● Another NMC recording, as part of its Debut Discs series, is in the can, this time focusing on the music of Edmund Finnis (b1984). The **London Chamber Orchestra** and **Britten Sinfonia**, together with violinists **Eloisa-Fleur Thom** and **Benjamin Beilman**, recorded the album at All Saints' Church in East Finchley in April, the results of which are due for release in 2019.

● The songs of Eric Coates and Sir Hamilton Harty were recorded for Somm by the mezzo **Kathryn Rudge** and pianist **Christopher Glynn** for two separate albums, for release in the months to come.

STUDIO FOCUS *Dame Sarah Connolly*

The Gramophone Award-winning mezzo has recently recorded an album for Signum that's very close to her heart



You've recently recorded a new album focused on Ivor Gurney; did that come about because you live in Gloucestershire where Gurney also hailed from?

No, I discovered him long before moving there. Like most people I came to him via 'Sleep', and decided to do a thesis on him at the Royal College of Music as a third-year thing. I went to the British Sound Archive and just immersed myself in his music and raided the RCM library and just got to know him and his music.

And what attracted you to Gurney?

Well, I felt that he really did live in Herbert Howells's shadow, but he's got something different to Howells. And then I read that Stanford grudgingly quite liked him, even though he put his red pen through most of his music! But he called him the little Schubert and I thought 'Yes, that's true'. He really had this gift for melody and so when I do recitals in really off-the-beaten-track places people always say 'Who was that? What was that song?' Maybe it's my relationship to the songs that did something special, maybe it was the song itself ...

And with Gurney you're not just getting a composer but also a poet and a biography that's quite horrifyingly raw at times.

It's a world captured in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy; you get an idea that Siegfried Sassoon, who shares a place with him in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, as an officer got more privileges in everything whereas Gurney, as a private soldier, was not celebrated. And that was his lot. Siegfried Sassoon's was very, very different - I think they missed each other in the hospital in Scotland by a few weeks, but whether they'd have ever mixed, officer and private soldier, I don't know. There's that side of him - someone who didn't come from a middle-class privileged background - that interests me too.

What were the origins of the recording?

I asked Nigel Short if Tenebrae would be interested in coming to sing for the fund-raising concert for the Ivor Gurney window at Gloucester Cathedral, which is something I'm heavily involved in. I'd just read Kate Kennedy's biography (it's not been published yet) and it was incredibly illuminating, following Gurney's day-by-day life, almost, in the trenches and who sent him what and so on. So with Tenebrae we did a kind of deal whereby I'd sing at a charity event in London and in return Tenebrae would come down to Gloucester. And we'd call it quits!

And there's new music here too ...

The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society helped commission Judith Bingham to write *A Walk with Ivor Gurney* and we performed it in the evening concert. (Judith and I were colleagues in the BBC Singers - neighbours! - for five years and I asked her to write this piece for me and the choir between us, inviting her to choose a poem by Gurney to set.) A whole load of my singer friends, including Felicity Lott, came and sang for free, and we all performed Gurney and his friends throughout the day. Then we did these Ivor Gurney songs in orchestrations by Finzi and Howells, which Jeremy Dibble sent me, and which Adrian Partington conducted. They're really extraordinary.

I get the feeling you enjoy singing new music. Is that the case?

Again, I go back to my time at the Royal College. I particularly befriended the composers. I've always been interested in contemporary music. I'd always sung music written by my friends and professors before I went to the RCM and I wanted to be part of that world. (I was less comfortable singing Mozart arias - which were usually too high for me anyway!) Sally Beamish has just written four fabulous songs for me for the Painswick Music Society. I'm really very touched by that. *Sarah Connolly's Ivor Gurney album is released in October*

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ORCHESTRA *Insight...*

Academy of Ancient Music

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1973

Home London and is also Orchestra-in-Residence in Cambridge

Music Director Richard Egarr (2006-)

Founding Music Director Christopher Hogwood (1973-2006)

The recording industry spawned many an orchestra in the early- to mid-20th century. But was the Academy of Ancient Music the last of its offspring? Britain's first full-scale orchestra playing on period-specific instruments was born of a pub conversation between Christopher Hogwood and the Decca producer Peter Wadland after a recording session involving a different Academy altogether, that of St Martin in the Fields.

Hogwood had been working as a harpsichordist and editor with the ASMF when he was approached by Wadland, the zealous and perfectionistic boss of Decca's early music imprint L'Oiseau-Lyre. Wadland probed Hogwood: could an ensemble of similar size to ASMF, but using only instruments authentic to the music being played, be assembled in London? If the Dutch and the Viennese could do it, the English surely could too. In March 1973 the Academy of Ancient Music was recording Overtures by Thomas Arne for Wadland's microphones.

Establishing early music ensembles was in vogue in 1973. The same year produced The Tallis Scholars, The English Concert and the Taverner Consort and Players. But the stars were aligned for the AAM. Wadland and Hogwood got on. The advent of the CD was around the corner. According to Sir Nicholas Kenyon, Hogwood had fully 'absorbed Neville's [Marriner] incredible professionalism about how to make recordings'.

Plenty followed. To barely even scrape the surface, we could mention Handel's *Messiah* with the Choir of Christ Church Oxford in 1980 and from 1979 a set of Mozart's symphonies as complete as complete could then be. 'The Mozart symphony



project did for us as Harnoncourt's Bach Cantatas did for him,' Hogwood told *Gramophone* a decade later.

At that time, the AAM was deep into Mozart and fast approaching Beethoven. Already, the group's characteristics were known: an incisiveness which appeared new to rhetorical music; a taming of 'new' old instruments in search of tasteful musical balance; and a firm rhythmic foundation ('that relentlessly over-emphatic sense of rhythm which is a Hogwood trademark,' wrote Hilary Finch in *Gramophone*'s May 1988 issue).

That the AAM can claim to be 'the most listened-to period instrument ensemble online' is connected to its catalogue of over 300 recordings made during the CD boom. But the ensemble is still at it. Sample its two recent Bach Passion recordings under Hogwood's successor Richard Egarr, and we hear once more the incisive pointing, vivid colour and, yes, strident rhythms for which the ensemble was recognised from the start. **Andrew Mellor**

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Lauren Zhang wins BBC Young Musician



The BBC Young Musician 2018 competition has been won by the 16-year-old pianist Lauren Zhang. She triumphed with a performance of Prokofiev's formidable Second Piano Concerto, accompanied by the CBSO and conductor Mark Wigglesworth. The other finalists were 18-year-old saxophonist Robert Burton and 18-year-old cellist Maxim Calver.

Zhang started piano lessons at the age of four and is currently studying for her GCSEs at school in Birmingham. She has quite a competition pedigree, having won prizes at the Ettlingen International Piano Competition in Germany, Young Pianist of the North International Competition and the Wales International Piano Festival, among others, and she is also an accomplished violinist. Zhang will be appearing at the BBC Young Musician 40th anniversary Prom on July 15 at the Royal Albert Hall in London, where she will join former winners of the competition including violinists Nicola Benedetti and Jennifer Pike, oboist Nicholas Daniel, clarinettist Emma Johnson and cellists Sheku Kanneh-Mason and Natalie Clein.

Gramophone on medici.tv

With this month's focus turned on percussion, our 'Gramophone Selects' feature on **medici.tv** includes James MacMillan's Second Percussion Concerto with Colin Currie and Dame Evelyn Glennie giving a marimba masterclass. We also include a documentary of the history of music through its instruments - in this case, ones you strike! Our Icon is the conductor Giuseppe Sinopoli, so as a reminder of his art you can see a complete performance of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* with Kiri Te Kanawa and Plácido Domingo heading a cast in Götz Friedrich's Covent Garden production from 1983. Our back-to-back performance is Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony - Erich Leinsdorf and Valery Gergiev doing the conducting honours. And for a young performer with a big future, see the pianist George Li playing Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto.

To find out more, visit **medici.tv** and type 'Gramophone selects' into the 'Search here' box.

FROM WHERE I SIT

It was fun and fear at the back of the orchestra recalls erstwhile percussionist Edward Seckerson



It's fun trawling for online definitions of 'percussion'. Most are light years behind the curve in evaluating or even just attempting to describe music's at-once most basic and highly sophisticated family of instruments. A phrase like 'the striking of one solid object with or against another with some degree of force' might hint at the origins but it doesn't even begin to address the evolution – ongoing, perpetually ongoing. Essentially any object that can be struck, stroked, shaken, scratched, stirred (and every other form of contact) is fair game. The tin-can drummer on the street corner, the beatboxer with his astonishing array of oral kit pumping and popping through a small amplifier. Try walking by him. Some primitive impulse stops us in our tracks.

Readers may, or may not, know of my vested interest in the 'cosmic kitchenware' celebrated in this issue but after many childhood years hopelessly persevering but never advancing with dreary piano teachers or in ruthless pursuit of a half-decent (or rather less agonising) sound on a violin I was wooed by a peripatetic music teacher (yes, they change lives) to join the school orchestra playing the tabor or military drum in a performance of Bizet's 'Farandole'. The power instilled in me from anchoring and driving the rhythm of the entire rag-tag band was immense.

I took lessons. I began with the side-drum – or more importantly the side-drum 'roll' – the basis of everything and a process wherein the analysis of how it is achieved has little bearing on finally being able to do it. I sought out hopelessly ambitious amateur orchestras, playing Mahler's Fifth with something called the Hammersmith Philharmonic where my most enduring memory was of the conductor turning to the elderly leader of the second violins in the Scherzo and shouting 'Don't panic, Elsie!'

Posher gigs beckoned: the Ernest Read Orchestra under Bernard Keeffe and the wonderful Muir Matheson (he of all those vintage film soundtracks) who would shout 'butchers!' at the strings and whose remark to me during a rehearsal for Elgar's *Cockaigne* Overture was witheringly on message: 'Mr Bass Drum – I applaud your enthusiasm but we will be needing the instrument for the concert, you know.' So, several dozen *Carmina Burana*s later, the terrifying UK premiere of Carlos Chávez's Toccata for Percussion, the equally terrifying single cymbal crash in Bruckner's Seventh Symphony (praying for a good contact and a big sound – that's assuming my timing was spot on), the beginnings of my journalistic career collided with the waning of my percussive pursuits and I found myself in front of the young Simon Rattle playing cymbals in Mahler Sixth's (for the Salomon Orchestra) a week after interviewing him for the first time. His initial confusion gave way to tentative encouragement – 'It had better be bloody classy' – and after some issues with the cowbells (not me, I hasten to add) suggesting, in Rattle's words, 'a bovine orgy', we collectively almost brought St John's, Smith Square, down into its crypt.

I miss the skin bashing and the metal beating – and I openly idolise those who push percussion's infinite possibilities to the stars and back with such passion, creativity and virtuosity. **G**

OUTSTANDING PERFORMERS ON DELPHIAN



DCD34200

J S Bach: Goldberg Variations Peter Hill

In the *Goldberg Variations* Bach answered a modest request – reputedly from an aristocratic patron who wanted music that was 'soft and somewhat lively' as a distraction from insomnia – with a work of immense scale and ambition. The music's wit and virtuosity is matched by the exquisite contrapuntal tracery of the canons that form the work's backbone, and by the tragic grandeur of the minor-key variations, which contain some of the most poignant music Bach ever wrote. Peter Hill here continues his acclaimed series of Bach recordings with a searchingly imaginative performance, capturing the music's zest and its depth of feeling in a reading that is as profoundly poetic as it is beautifully coloured.



DCD34202

Julian Anderson: Choral Music

Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge /
Geoffrey Webber

'The desire to evoke the sensation of light was one reason why I became a composer,' says Julian Anderson. Silver-bright and brilliantly focused, the Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge is ideally equipped for this first recording devoted entirely to Anderson's choral music. From the intimacy of the wedding anthem *My beloved spake* and ringing clarity of *Bell Mass*, to the virtuosic second of the *Four American Choruses* and the extraordinary sound-world conjured by the *Nunc dimittis*, commissioned specially with this recording project in view, Geoffrey Webber's singers have lived with this music over a period of around two years before committing it to disc, and their deep sympathy for its marriage of immaculate technique with emotional directness is evident throughout.

'Singing that impresses with great intensity, accuracy and often quite terrific power'
— Choir & Organ, July/August 2017



DCD34204

William Mundy: Sacred Choral Music

Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh /
Duncan Ferguson

Already celebrated in surveys of John Tavener and John Sheppard, the Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh now showcase the often overlooked music of William Mundy, which was at the heart of the Marian Catholic revival and then, just a few years later, made a vital contribution to the development of the Elizabethan motet. Their programme centres on Mundy's two most extended festal compositions – the celebrated *Vox patris caelestis* and, newly reconstructed, the little-known *Maria virgo sanctissima*. Two further premiere recordings feature alongside the remarkable collaboration of Mundy, Sheppard and a young William Byrd on music for the Easter procession to the font, *In exitu Israel*. Combining powerful music on a ceremonial scale with shorter liturgical works, this recording conveys the choir's sheer joy in their now firmly established role as ambassadors of sixteenth-century polyphony.

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GRAMOPHONE

CLASSICAL MUSIC AWARDS 2018

Orchestra of the Year Award



We're inviting you, our readers, to vote for a new Award, **Orchestra of the Year**. We've compiled a shortlist of eight ensembles who have made a particular impression on our critics this year, and we've selected two or three recordings for each orchestra to support the nomination. Have a listen on CD or at your favourite streaming site (we've made playlists at Qobuz, Spotify and Apple Music – simply search for Orchestra2018) and cast your vote at gramophone.co.uk/awards. Voting closes at midnight on July 31.

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks



One of the world's finest ensembles, the Bavarian RSO – founded in 1949 – has been in the excellent care of Mariss Jansons since 2003. He's one of the great orchestra trainers and the standard of playing he and the orchestra's guests conductors draw from this Munich-based group is mighty impressive. His recently released Rachmaninov recording, combining *The Bells* and the *Symphonic Dances*, has colour, precision of intonation and wonderful rhythmic control combined with a rare sense of fantasy – qualities that also ignite a work you wouldn't associate with Jansons, Varèse's *Amérique*. A live Mahler Third from 2016, under Bernard Haitink, also recently released by BR-Klassik, reveals a highly responsive Mahler ensemble on top form.

Rachmaninov Jansons BR-Klassik (4/18)

Varèse Jansons BR-Klassik (4/18)

Mahler Haitink BR-Klassik (8/17)

Chamber Orchestra of Europe



No stranger to the *Gramophone* Awards, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, established in 1981, is an ensemble of versatility, characterised by some very classy playing. Long associated with Abbado, Haitink and Harnoncourt, the COE can, chameleon-like, give its conductors playing of

enormous variety and elegance. Yannick Nézet-Séguin's Mendelssohn symphony cycle – itself embracing a wide range of ensemble work – was a highlight of the year yet his Prokofiev, with Lisa Batiashvili, found the COE assuming a quite different colour and approach. Then, joined by Piotr Anderszewski as pianist-director, we were treated to two Mozart piano concertos of sublime beauty and assurance.

Mendelssohn Nézet-Séguin DG (9/17)

Prokofiev Batiashvili; Nézet-Séguin DG (3/18)

Mozart Anderszewski Warner Classics (2/18)

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra Freiburger Barockorchester



Whether playing Handel's *Concerti a due cori* with its regular directors Gottfried von der Goltz and Petra Müllejans and displaying wonderful assurance, or giving Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto a delicious silvery glint in the company of Isabelle Faust and Pablo Heras-Casado or adding a foundation of rich, glowing warmth to Mozart's Requiem under the direction of René Jacobs, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra are one of Europe's most stylish – and flexible. Their move into music of the middle of the 19th century has been a gloriously ear-opening experience – fire and ice fused to create playing of real character, alert yet also majestic and hugely impressive.

Mendelssohn Faust; Heras-Casado Harmonia Mundi (A/17)

Handel von der Goltz, Müllejans Harmonia Mundi (5/18)

Mozart Jacobs Harmonia Mundi (11/17)

London Symphony Orchestra



After a transatlantic trio of concerts of late-period Mahler with the LSO and Sir Simon Rattle, *The New Yorker's* Alex Ross wrote that 'the orchestra is playing sensationally well for him. You have the sense of a conductor and ensemble in near-perfect alignment.' And that verdict could as easily have been made after hearing Rattle's glorious performance (since recorded) of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

And yet the orchestra can play Mendelssohn with its best period manners for John Eliot Gardiner, giving the *Lobegesang* a sinewy, lithe beauty that utterly dispels any lingering whiff of Victoriana. Or indeed underpinning Bartók's two violin concertos for Renaud Capuçon in his very fine coupling. It's an orchestra on fire, and lucky for Londoners, its considerable glory flares up with every concert.

Debussy Rattle LSO Live (12/17)

Mendelssohn Gardiner LSO Live (10/17)

Bartók Capuçon; Roth Erato (4/18)

Il Pomo d'Oro



The go-to Baroque orchestra for vocal recitals and operas, Il Pomo d'Oro is based in Italy but draws its members internationally and is directed by the charismatic Russian conductor Maxim Emelyanychev (soon to head the Scottish CO – see page 8). It brings a remarkable freshness to whatever it does and this year has continued its 'In War and Peace' concert tour with Joyce DiDonato (following last year's *Gramophone* Recital Award-winning recording). Among the highlights of 2017-18's recordings were recitals with Ann Hallenberg and Franco Fagioli as well as a complete Handel opera, *Ottone*, for which they were directed by George Petrou. This autumn they will be heard alongside Erato's new signing, the impressive young Polish countertenor Jakub Jósef Orlinski.

'Carnevale 1729' Hallenberg; Montanari Pentatone (A/17)

Handel (Arias) Fagioli; Valova DG (3/18)

Handel (Ottone) Petrou Decca (9/17)

Les Siècles



The French took a while to embrace period-performance practice, and it took the American William Christie to show them the – very stylish – way, but a generation or two on and François-Xavier Roth founded his group Les Siècles in 2003, drawing on a huge pool of talented players, to reinvent the orchestral concert and to tackle a wide range of music from the Baroque to the 20th century. Their recordings of the Stravinsky ballets opened many ears and this year saw them tackle some more Diaghilev-inspired fare, Ravel's *Daphnis et*

Chloé with a follow-up of shorter Ravel works including *Le tombeau de Couperin*, equally successfully and innovative. They also partnered Sabine Devieille with consummate style and a breathtaking range of colour on her lovely recital, 'Mirages'.

Ravel (Tombeau) Roth Harmonia Mundi (5/18)

Ravel (Daphnis) Roth Harmonia Mundi (6/17)

'Mirages' Devieille; Roth Erato (12/17)

Seattle Symphony



The Seattle Symphony has a long tradition in the recording studios; under Gerard Schwarz, its Music Director from 1985 to 2011, it recorded extensively for Delos and Naxos leaving a priceless discography of largely American music. Now this 115-year-old ensemble is back making recordings (usually based on live performances) and is sounding superb. Ludovic Morlot (2011-19) has focused on French repertoire including Messiaen and Dutilleux – with a rewarding side-step towards Charles Ives – while the ensemble's Music Director-elect Thomas Dausgaard has taken them into other under-explored areas of the repertoire. After last year's *Gramophone* Award-shortlisted Mahler Tenth, we've had a bracing and thrilling coupling of Nielsen's Third and Fourth Symphonies.

Messiaen Morlot Seattle SO (10/17)

Ives Morlot Seattle SO (9/17)

Nielsen Dausgaard Seattle SO

Vienna Symphony Orchestra Wiener Symphoniker



Often overshadowed by its rather more glamorous neighbour, the Philharmonic, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra has, in its 118-year history, had some very distinguished conductors – people like Sawallisch, Giulini and Rozhdestvensky – and close relationships with Furtwängler, Karajan, Krips and Prêtre. Now in the care of Philippe Jordan, the ensemble is playing with great style and precision, something that has characterised the first two instalments in their ongoing Beethoven symphony cycle; a very 21st-century blend of tradition and heft with a liveness and flexibility that has cross-pollinated from the period-instrument world.

Beethoven (1&3) Jordan Wiener Symphoniker (1/18)

Beethoven (4&5) Jordan Wiener Symphoniker (6/18)



A renewed interest in percussion has broadened the language of classical music, writes **Andrew Mellor**. But where has the recent explosion of developments taken us and where do we go from here?

Martin Grubinger (centre) and his Percussive Planet Ensemble at the 2015 Eurovision Contest in Vienna

Listening to the world



PHOTOGRAPHY: DIETER NAGL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The atomic scientists of the Manhattan Project famously gorged on music as they worked in secret at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. But it wasn't all Bach and Schubert that they were listening to. On the playlist, according to the testimony of record producer Roy Harris, was Nicolas Slonimsky's 1934 recording of Varèse's *Ionisation*.

Ionisation had been premiered at Carnegie Hall the year before Slonimsky's recording was made. Notwithstanding one or two tentative precursors (among them Antheil's *Ballet mécanique* of 1924), Varèse had given the world its first notable work for an ensemble consisting entirely of percussion

instruments. The score calls for 40 vessels in all: drums, rattles, anvils, celesta, piano, chimes, gongs, cymbals, two fire engine sirens and a confection of non-Western instruments, all played by 13 musicians. '*Ionisation*, though only six minutes long, carried the seeds of musical revolution,' concluded Alan Rich in his book *American Pioneers* (1995).

Much like the fallout from the atomic bomb itself, the effects of that musical revolution are still being felt today. Those who joined in the chorus of ridicule and denunciation that followed *Ionisation*'s premiere had failed to hear just how astute Varèse had been in listening to the world around him, or how prescient his view of a new direction for music would prove. It was surely no accident that the scientists at Oak Ridge had homed in on a piece whose title refers directly to the process of atomic fission. But as the critic Heinz-Klaus Metzger underlined in his 'Hommage à Edgard Varèse' (1959), 'The average listener who relates to *Ionisation* with alarm and bombardment has actually experienced more of the substance of the piece than the expert.'

In that comment is enshrined the increasing popularity of music for percussion in the 21st century. Percussion and percussionists have injected the classical music world with energy, attitude, spectacle and an array of new sounds that, at their best, offer an alternative to the faceless reinvention of spurious traditions. In so doing, they have made wider audiences excited about new works for the concert hall in a way their violinist and pianist colleagues have struggled to for the best part of a century. As Metzger suggested in his review of *Ionisation*, the sounds Varèse envisaged might have led directly to the experimental works of Cage, but they also bypassed the tonality-versus-atonality bun fight that was proliferating in mid-20th-century Europe and brought the world itself, in both the simplest and the broadest terms, into the concert hall. 'I shall think of *Ionisation* while the atomic bomb is tearing apart the inertia of the world,' wrote Slonimsky to Varèse on February 26, 1946.

That Varèse, an immigrant from Europe, started to play around with instruments that could be shaken, struck, squeezed or stroked while enjoying a new life in America, was no accident. Debussy and Strauss had steadily enlarged the percussion section of the orchestra and Satie had introduced pistols and typewriters to it. But it was the rise of American dance bands in the 1930s that channelled an array of new and often harmonic percussion instruments into the concert hall: the marimba from Africa (it gained chromatic notes via Spain and Mexico), the xylophone from South East Asia and eastern Europe, and drum kits from China (courtesy of swathes of immigration from that country to the US).

'Europe was slow to respond to the developments from America,' explains Gert Mortensen, percussion guru and professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. 'After *Ionisation* you had Stockhausen's *Zyklus*, the first solo percussion piece, written in

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1959 – the year after I was born. But even when I was studying, there was hardly any repertoire. There was the Milhaud Concerto for percussion and small orchestra (1929-30), and groups like Maxwell Davies's *Fires of London* (1965-87) were commissioning and playing chamber music for percussion – but there wasn't anything like the repertoire we have today and there wasn't the interest either. When the breakthrough came, later on, it was something that was needed in classical music. People were looking for something new.'

In 1982, Mortensen gave a masterclass at the Royal Academy of Music in London and among the attendees was a 19-year-old Evelyn Glennie. 'All they had was orchestral percussion – a triangle and some drums,' recalls Mortensen. 'But along came this small girl, and it was clear she was going to make a big, big difference.'

Within five years, Glennie was explaining the finer points of percussion technique on Terry Wogan's sofa and was well on her way to being recognised as a pioneer. But she faced the same problem as Mortensen had before her. 'In those days, you were obsessed with creating repertoire,' says Glennie. 'It was about making sure there was enough substantial repertoire for someone else to come along and say, "I want to be a solo percussionist," and not to have anyone question it.' To see how far things have come, one need only look to orchestras. 'The last concerto I played was in Antwerp and it was one of three percussion concertos in the orchestra's season,' says Glennie. 'That's slightly unusual, but it's not unusual at all to see one or possibly two.' Meanwhile, the Austrian percussionist Martin Grubinger, with his Percussive Planet Ensemble, presents his very own five-concert subscription series each season in classical music's inner sanctum, Vienna.

None of this would be possible without the huge growth in repertoire spearheaded by the likes of Glennie. But what



From above left, clockwise: Colin Currie; Evelyn Glennie at the opening of the 2012 Olympics; and Martin Grubinger

direction has that repertoire taken? And has its rapid expansion sometimes produced duds – experimental works where the experiment didn't work? 'One problem was that composers didn't have many percussionists to bounce their ideas off,' says Glennie. What does she remember, technically, of the first concertos she commissioned? 'In the early days, particularly with respect to concertos, there was this sort of question-and-answer style – so the orchestra would play and then the percussionist would play. It was very to and fro.' In Mortensen's words, 'A lot of percussion concertos simply never worked. The percussionist was always at the front of the stage, inaudible to many in the orchestra who didn't know what to listen for anyway. It was all the wrong way round.'

For many European composers of the late 20th century, the lessons of *Ionisation* had either faded or not been properly absorbed in the first place. Paradoxically, it took a masterpiece to underline the fact. At the 1992 Proms, Glennie gave the first performance of James MacMillan's percussion concerto *Veni, veni, Emmanuel* – one of the most cherished and performed pieces of contemporary music, and one that has proved no stranger to the record catalogue. 'The thing about *Veni, veni*

is that it's not really a percussion concerto in the truest sense; it's really a concerto for orchestra,' says Glennie.

Listening to *Veni, veni* from a percussionist's perspective, it's noticeable how MacMillan's harmonic deconstruction, focused squarely on the orchestra, has proved more interesting and longstanding than his writing for a soloist mainly playing drums. 'This is a piece with power, with ethereal qualities, with a depth of dynamic both vertically and horizontally, and which completely scoops up both players and audiences,' says Glennie. 'But if you listen to it on record, you still get the impression that it could be the orchestral percussionists you're hearing rather than a concerto soloist.'

'There has always been this tendency to think of rhythm as being percussion's most important ingredient, but that's not the case at all' – Evelyn Glennie



The Colin Currie Group recording the music of Steve Reich; Currie admits to a renewed focus on the American composer, who tends to favour ensemble over concerto

Reference has been made in these pages to MacMillan ‘confusing effect with content’ (Philip Clark, 1/12) in *Veni, veni*. While I would tentatively suggest that the score can be seen as a piece of music, I would also point out that it can seem symptomatic of a time when percussion was treated as little more than rhythmic seasoning, spicing up music that sits otherwise on very different foundations – in other words, going back to Strauss, Debussy and Satie: pre-*Ionisation*.

But 1992 was a quarter of a century ago. And according to Colin Currie, who introduced MacMillan’s Percussion Concerto No 2 to the world in 2014, a lot has changed. The classical music community’s understanding of the percussion universe has gained sophistication, and MacMillan’s two concertos chart the process. ‘Certainly the writing in the Second Concerto shows how much things have advanced since *Veni, veni*,’ says Currie. ‘It concentrates on tuned instruments, but the way James writes for the mallet instrument alone is more ambitious, more demanding, more fulsome – and all for brilliant musical ends. It’s an example of how percussion sonorities can carry a whole concerto and in a very melodic way. After the very “drummy” atmosphere of *Veni, veni*, it’s a fundamentally melodic piece, and I would say a very dignified one.’

The difference between these two approaches is vital. Not only does it reflect the structural faith in percussion instruments as foretold by *Ionisation*, it arguably maps the

Western classical tradition’s own coming-to-terms with the language of percussion, its capabilities and its potential. ‘There has always been this tendency to think of rhythm as being percussion’s most important ingredient, but that’s not the case at all,’ says Glennie. ‘In execution it can look extremely rhythmic. But can you imagine trying to notate a 20th-century Violin Concerto in rhythms alone? It would be extraordinarily complex. When you consider percussion’s origins in ethnic cultures – African, Latin American, Middle Eastern, Far Eastern – you realise that it’s about voice and line.’

Within his labyrinthine series of 17 rooms at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, Gert Mortensen has amassed what is reputedly Europe’s largest collection of percussion instruments within an educational setting. Two of the largest rooms, each the size of two squash courts side by side, sprout instruments from every surface – including the ceiling. ‘These are gongs from Burma,’ Mortensen says, weaving his way through the kitchen-like space, pointing left and right. ‘Here are a series of hollowed logs from the Cook Islands, where there are entire log orchestras. These are *dagus*, Chinese drums. This is what’s known in the West as a “stone play” – a traditional Chinese instrument dating back 3000 years.’ In the adjoining room is the world’s first gamelan tuned to the Western chromatic scale, commissioned by Mortensen to coax European composers into using its distinctive sound.

If we count *Ionisation* as a coming of age for notated, Western music for percussion, the presence of ethnic instruments in Varèse's score also underlines how important non-Western music was to the process. 'Any serious percussion teacher is a kind of ethnomusicologist,' Mortensen says, describing his current penchant for the Far East and pointing to the various instrumental souvenirs this has produced.

Grubinger founded his Percussive Planet Ensemble to underline his belief that percussion, more than any other instrumental group, can evangelise for musical globalisation. He has assimilated musical styles from around the world into performances he sees as fundamentally 'classical' (as anyone who saw his performance at the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest might remember). But still, he believes, we have only scraped the surface. 'There are undiscovered instruments, rhythms and traditions from all over the world,' he says. 'Last week I was working in Vienna with a fabulous percussionist from the UK, Pete Lockett, who crosses Indian music with Latin and funk, and who is influenced by so many different percussion traditions. This is the way percussion will develop in the coming decades, with instruments and traditions and sounds and rhythms from different cultures that we don't even know about.'

'Most composers are turning back to writing for a smaller collection of instruments and focusing on key items ... the circus is now over' – Colin Currie

Closer to home, Europe and America continue to develop and manufacture new instruments. Both Currie and Glennie have recently taken possession of an Aluphone, a rack of bell-like vessels arranged chromatically over three octaves, which MacMillan includes in the score for his Percussion Concerto No 2.

But as our stages fill with equipment, there are signs of a shift in the other direction – a natural, cyclic purge of the genre's associated clutter in an attempt to find something altogether more focused. 'I certainly think percussionists want to move away from having loads of stuff on stage, and from the idea of running around and hitting this and that,' says Glennie. 'It's partly because some of us are getting old and considering our own agility, but of course promoters have come full circle and are starting to think of the economic implications of hiring so much kit.'

With percussionists still very much in control of shaping the repertoire through commissioning new works, these developments are having an effect on the direction of the genre. 'Most of the composers I work with are turning back to writing for a smaller collection of instruments and focusing on key items like the marimba and vibraphone,' says Currie, who hints at his wish to commission a concerto for marimba alone. His own focus on the intricately woven and largely harmonic percussion music of Steve Reich (his new record label Colin Currie Records was inaugurated earlier this year with his ensemble's performance of Reich's *Drumming*) reflects the trend. It also ploughs a furrow alternative to that of the fashionable and perhaps overexposed genre of the percussion concerto itself.

In musical terms, this process of turning inwards – of looking for purer, more consistent sounds and taking a more forensic



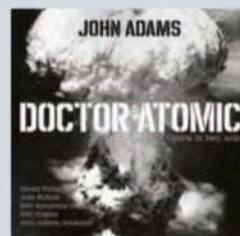
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view of the principle of 'contact' that is percussion's lifeblood – might well provide another moment of transformation for the genre. Works like Roger Reynolds's *Sanctuary* (2007) shy away from the rhetorical language of hitting and thwacking, much like Reich's did earlier; for Reynolds, resonance comes from tapping fingers lightly on skin or wood, or from beer bottles moved over tabletops. Those gestures appear purposefully ordinary, just as a man or woman negotiating Rautavaara's Percussion Concerto (*Incantations*, 2008) appears purposefully *extraordinary*. Unsurprisingly, the subtlety and delicacy of these works have been embraced by the recording studio.

'This is how percussion will develop, with instruments from different cultures that we don't even know about' – Martin Grubinger

Take away the beer bottle and the tabletop altogether, and you're left with the human body – an instrument for some of the most extraordinary percussion works of the last decade. Anna Meredith's *Hands Free* (2012) was designed for performance by instrumentalists without instruments. In one sense it refracted the idea of the percussion genre's language as one born of natural, physical impulses rather than a search for ever more exotic or shaded sounds; in another, it linked hands once more with the ethnic traditions from which much of those quests for colour, in the West at least, originated. As Grubinger says, 'The great thing these days is that composers themselves come from different traditions and have different views about what percussion actually is.'

The first half of Julia Wolfe's concerto *Rise and Fly* (2012), commissioned by Currie, consists of nothing more than the soloist extracting music from his amplified upper torso. Wolfe could (justifiably) claim that a certain corporeality is achieved by that sort of timbral focus, but precisely the same was argued by Harry Partch, who assembled huge and spectacular instruments from all manner of *objets trouvés* in the 1960s and united them on stage, unashamedly revelling in the notion that we listen almost as well with our eyes as with our ears.

The very idea of listening with our eyes poses a problem for the percussion world, and it's one from which the scaling down described by both Glennie and Currie may well have sprung. 'The circus is over now,' says Currie pertinently, referring to the spectacle of a percussionist leaping about a stage, hitting out at everything in sight. So spectacular did the idea of a percussion concerto become, in certain composers' hands, that it seemed as though music had lost out to theatre, acrobatics and conjuring tricks.

Glennie – who once said, 'When I hang up my sticks it will be the most creative time' – is dedicating her career to the art of listening, and even hopes to establish a 'centre for listening' in which figures from the world of sport, business, medicine, the arts and even aviation will share their experiences of the listening process. 'We need to reconnect with each other to really learn what listening is,' she says – resonant words from an individual who had to 'relearn' what it was to listen when her own ears ceased to function.

It is the novelty of the percussion world, as well as its visual complexity, that has sometimes made even the professional 'listeners' among us rely too much on our eyes when experiencing the genre. When Grubinger talks of his hopes

for the future of the percussion community, it is a focus on listening that forms their basis too. 'My dream would be that people could listen to the same concerto three times in one season,' he says. 'You can hear the Beethoven Violin Concerto three times a season here in Vienna, and then discuss the interpretations. Imagine if we had, let's say, Kalevi Aho's Percussion Concerto – a piece that Colin [Currie] commissioned – from three different soloists, each bringing their own interpretation to it. Maybe that's the next step for percussion as a solo instrument.'

Currie's record label will help the continuing efforts to secure something like a 'canon' of percussion works, and allow – as his recording of Reich's *Drumming* has – alternative interpretations to underline the robustness of the compositions themselves. But the idea of establishing a repertoire of percussion music, particularly concertos, is tricky when the flow of new works continues to gather pace. A luxurious problem, you might say. But in the midst of the cacophony, *Ionisation* and a handful of other pieces remind us what we're listening for: music that reflects the world around it, and can only do so because it listens to life itself. **G**

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

A bash at listening to the world in percussion-centric works



Varèse:
Ionisation
Chicago Symphony
Orchestra /
Pierre Boulez

DG (9/01)

This is where it all started. It's the first significant work for ensemble of percussion instruments alone (1929-31), and a piece whose new sonorities would influence swathes of 20th-century music.



Stockhausen:
Zyklus
Maurizio Ben Omar
perc
Stradivarius

Stockhausen's 1959 'test piece' for a percussionist surrounded by instruments is a cycle that may be commenced at any point and played backwards or forwards.



Takemitsu:
**From Me
Flows What
You Call Time**
Nexus, Pacific

Symphony Orchestra / Carl St Clair
Sony Classical

This concerto from 1990 upended expectations. It's a work of meditation, lyricism, delectable colour and significant quietness in which a team of percussionists is positioned around the orchestra.



MacMillan:
**Veni, veni,
Emmanuel**
Evelyn Glennie *perc*
Scottish Chamber

Orchestra / Jukka-Pekka Saraste
RCA Red Seal (9/93)

The most listened-to percussion concerto since that by Milhaud of six decades earlier, this work brought the genre to the BBC Proms in 1992 and to wider popularity thereafter.



Rautavaara:
Incantations
Colin Currie *perc*
Helsinki PO /
John Storgårds

Ondine (4/12)

Rautavaara's 2008 concerto conjures the mystic with mallet instruments and the shamanistic with drums, weaving the whole into a naturally unfolding orchestral canvas.



Reynolds:
Sanctuary
Steven Schick *perc*
Red Fish Blue Fish
Mode (1/12)

One of a number of more recent works that have redefined the percussion universe with a forensic view of the act of contact, Reynolds's *Sanctuary* is a milestone of percussion's 'new minimalism'.

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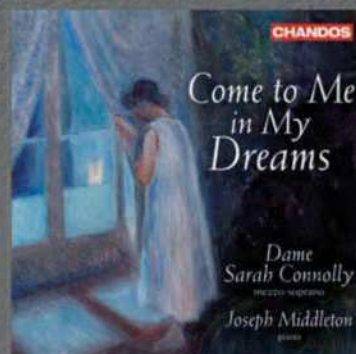
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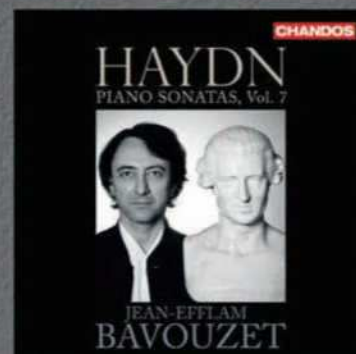
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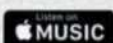


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STAY IN THE KNOW





Hurrah for OPERA RARA

Since its launch more than 40 years ago, the company has been tirelessly championing neglected operatic gems, writes **Richard Lawrence** ahead of a special Donizetti performance conducted by Sir Mark Elder at Covent Garden

Donizetti's *Les martyrs* in 2014 with Spyres, El-Khoury, Elder and the OAE

Here's a news item that must have surprised the opera world when it was announced earlier in the year: on July 18, the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, will present the world premiere of an opera by Donizetti – a concert performance of *L'ange de Nisida*, led by a cast including Joyce El-Khoury and conducted by Sir Mark Elder. A second performance follows on July 21, and a CD recording will be issued next year.

This is the latest project of Opera Rara, a company of infinite resource (artistic rather than financial – more of that anon) which for the past 40 years has enriched the catalogue with recordings of, mainly, Italian operas from the first half of the 19th century. (If you want to make a start, try the 2011 Gramophone Award-winning performance of Rossini's *Ermione*.) The founders were Patric Schmid (1944–2005) and Don White (1935–95). One of their first stars was the Romanian-born soprano Nelly Miricioiu, who speaks warmly about Schmid. 'Patric said that he'd been looking for a soprano for about 30 years and he'd finally found her,' she says. She had been

singing in radio broadcasts from the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, but didn't know she was a *bel canto* singer. 'In eastern Europe we don't have such classifications, apart from *verismo*; but finally I learnt that I was a dramatic coloratura.' She was never attracted to middle-period Verdi, but she could sing Elisabetta in Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* for breakfast, lunch and dinner. 'I think I was born a queen,' she laughs.

Another artist associated with Opera Rara from the early days was David Parry, the conductor of *Ermione* and many other recordings. A chance meeting with Schmid led to his being engaged first as a répétiteur and then as conductor. 'Because of him,' he says, 'I learnt how to look at music with a fresh eye. Getting involved with repertoire that has no performing tradition, because it has been unperformed for so long, led me to look at the music with a questioning eye and I felt able to cast aside preconceptions about performance. When Patric died I was asked to take over responsibility for artistic planning, which I did and enjoyed for several years.'

'It's often an accident whether an opera survives ... a singer can retire or the stage sets can disappear' – Roger Parker, Opera Rara

Operas by Donizetti – 25 so far – are the greatest single element in the Opera Rara catalogue. That this is continuing – after *L'ange de Nisida* they will record *Il paria* ('The Pariah') – is in part owing to the appointment of Roger Parker as repertoire consultant not long after Elder became artistic director in 2011. 'The opportunity to collaborate with Mark was one of the main reasons why I took it on,' he says. As co-editor of the Donizetti critical edition, he was working on *Les martyrs*, the French adaptation of *Poliuto*, and it was he who persuaded Elder that it should be recorded. He is also excited by *Il paria*, for which a new edition had to be made: 'It's full of invention, with Beethovenian writing for the orchestra.' But Parker is selective in his recommendations, always concerned that the operas chosen for recording should, so to speak, have a dramatic life. So when I enquire about *Mercadante*, once as famous as his contemporaries Bellini and Donizetti, Parker is judiciously negative. 'There's something very studied about *Mercadante*,' he says. 'I'm always fascinated when looking at the scores, but less fascinated when they're performed. If there's too much beautiful music, it's not going to work dramatically. I feel the same about Meyerbeer.'

The reference to Meyerbeer is a reminder that Opera Rara continues to look beyond the early *ottocento*. They recently moved into the world of *verismo* with Leoncavallo's *Zazà*, and they will soon be recording Puccini's *Le villi* – the first version, which was submitted to a competition for one-act operas but not placed because, according to Parker, the judges couldn't read the composer's handwriting.

Parker has his eye on France. 'Espoir', last year's recital disc by Michael Spyres, includes two excerpts from Halévy's *Guido et Ginévra* (one of them a duet with El-Khoury, who is featured on a companion disc): 'It's amazing music – even Berlioz liked it,' Parker enthuses. There really are a lot of forgotten masterpieces, he adds. 'It's often an accident whether operas survive – they can lose traction because a singer retires or the stage sets disappear.' Then there is French opera from later in the century. Saint-Saëns's *Henry VIII* is 'a staggering piece', continues Parker, 'with tunes of the period'; he also has Gounod and Massenet in his sights. This is the territory of the lavish



productions from the Palazzetto Bru Zane – Centre de Musique Romantique Française, and it turns out that the two organisations are regularly in touch.

What about German opera? This would suit the bass Brindley Sherratt, who appears on some of Opera Rara's Italian and French recordings but who tells me that he is now more likely to be heard as Wagner's Pogner or Strauss's Baron Ochs. Parker is particularly interested in Singspiel (German opera with spoken dialogue): he cites *Romeo und Julie* (1776) by Mozart's older contemporary Georg Benda, and he sees a gap in the repertoire of the period between Mozart and Weber.

Weber crops up briefly in conversation with Elder, who conducted *Euryanthe* at Glyndebourne some years ago and who has a dream to record the first version of *Tannhäuser* for Opera Rara with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. 'The orchestration is like Weber's,' he says, 'and there is so much Italian opera in early Wagner, who was such an admirer of Bellini.' For the time being, though, he is concentrating on the Italians: as well as the performance of *L'ange de Nisida*, this month sees the release of a recording of the uncut version of Rossini's *Semiramide*.

I ask how Elder came to be associated with Opera Rara. He pays generous tribute to Schmid, with whom he worked on Donizetti's *Dom Sébastien*. When he was approached by Stephen Revell, Opera Rara's then managing director, he thought hard about the future. 'Patric had built up a back catalogue of incredible size and range, but the vast majority of people knew nothing about it. Thanks to the support of the Peter Moores Foundation, the financial requirements and challenges were looked after, really, but the company had, in my view, become quite inward-looking. So Stephen and I decided we should try to interest more people in what we did, with well-prepared, musicologically sound performances of operas of which people might know the title, or just one aria.'

I think back to Roger Parker's remark about the element of chance in whether or not an opera survived beyond its first performances. Might there not be other reasons for an opera's



Top left, clockwise: bass Brindley Sherratt; soprano Albina Shagimuratova; Nelly Miricioiu, one of Opera Rara's first stars; Joycel El-Khoury and Michael Spyres

disappearance? Elder is eloquent on the subject. 'The idea that something unknown is by definition second-rate was an interesting challenge. The music of the first half of the 19th century, in Italy and indeed in France, is very vulnerable. It's dependent on the passion and precision with which it's performed. I've been interested in this for all my career. What is it that makes Italian music in the theatre so engaging and thrilling when it's well done, and so boring when it's not? The singers need to be right for the part, have the right technique and the right attitude towards the style.'

Elder is not sure that he is the one to conduct them, but he recognises that there are *verismo* operas that deserve to be recorded: 'Our recording of *Zazà* – conducted by Maurizio Benini – has

shown that *Pagliacci* isn't the only good piece that Leoncavallo wrote.' As for other neglected operas, he feels that from a sales point of view Opera Rara needs to be careful about the balance of the repertory. So he is dubious about the early German Romantics – Spohr, Marschner – and not excited by Spontini, one of the composers active in Napoleonic Paris. French opera from later in the 19th century does engage him, however. 'I looked at Gounod's *La reine de Saba*,' he says. 'It has some good scenes. But when I studied *La colombe* I thought I'd struck gold. The music just leaps off the page.'

When the conversation turns to Offenbach (German-born, French by adoption – a bit like Meyerbeer), Elder bubbles with enthusiasm. 'For the recording of *Fantasio* we worked with Jean-Christophe Keck, who had prepared a new edition and who knows all there is to know about Offenbach. There's romance as well as humour, and the music is irresistible. Something that we hope to do is to inspire opera companies to put on the works we record.' This has already happened, in fact: *Zazà* was a success at Opera Holland Park last year, while the Opéra Comique production of *Fantasio* has been performed in Rouen and Geneva as well as in Paris, and 2019 will see a production at one of England's summer festivals. Schmid wasn't really interested in promoting the recordings, according



to Elder; but nowadays it's essential to get across the idea that the Opera Rara operas are exceptional in order to raise the necessary money.

The question of money comes up, too, when I meet Henry Little, who succeeded Revell in 2015 (as chief executive). Owners of Opera Rara's recent recordings will notice acknowledgements to outside organisations, including Arts Council England and, indeed, the Palazzetto Bru Zane. Some 70 to 80 per cent of the company's income has to be raised from trusts, foundations and individuals. Opera Rara has a tiny staff: two full-time members, two part-time, plus a handful of consultants. Their work includes fundraising, but Little and his team also benefit from an active board under Charles Alexander, former director and deputy chairman of ENO.

'Why is Italian music in the theatre so engaging and thrilling when it's well done, and so boring when it's not?' – Mark Elder

Henry Little details the workings of the company. The casting consultant is Jesús Iglesias Noriega, head of artistic affairs at the Dutch National Opera; another consultant is, of course, Parker, who advises on voices as well as repertoire. 'We ask the singers to prepare a role, which is almost always new to them,' says Little, 'and then to record it and sing it in concert.' (Some recordings are taken from the concert performances.) 'It's a fantastic opportunity for them, and also a very high learning investment, as they are unlikely to sing this repertoire around the world for the rest of their career'. Some coaching takes place in Opera Rara's spacious open-plan office, which boasts a grand piano: Little recalls sessions for *Semiramide* in which Elder and Albina Shagimuratova were engaged in what amounted to 'a forensic dissection of the title-role'.

One of Opera Rara's more recent stars is Michael Spyres. Like many tenors – Lauritz Melchior, Ramón Vinay, James King (admittedly heavier examples of the breed) – he started out as a baritone. 'I thought I could be a tenor,' he told me, 'but I had no role models until I heard Bruce Ford and Chris Merritt on Opera Rara recordings. I realised that if I was going to be a real opera singer I had to be like them, someone who sang tenor-range things but still had a baritone quality.' Auditions in

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Full cast, chorus and orchestra under Mark Elder in *Les martyrs* sessions, 2014

Europe for roles in operas like *La traviata* and *Carmen* led nowhere, but in 2008, at the age of 28, he was cast as Rossini's Otello at the *bel canto* festival in Bad Wildbad, Germany. Seasons at the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro followed, and he sought out Opera Rara. For a man who originally wanted to do cartoon voiceover work like Mel Blanc's for *Looney Tunes*, his progress has been remarkable. Still under 40, he has (to date) performed 76 roles in 72 operas. 'I wouldn't have the career I have now had it not been for Opera Rara,' he says. '*Les martyrs* and *Le duc d'Albe* (also by Donizetti) are incredibly beautiful and heartfelt. There's no one else doing this repertoire; and Opera Rara does it in the right way – there's no other label in the world like it.'

Spyres is not appearing in *L'ange de Nisida*, but the part of Sylvia – the only woman – is being sung by his co-star in *Les martyrs*, El-Khoury. The story behind this world premiere is an extraordinary one. In 1838 Donizetti moved to Paris to work on a number of projects (including converting the Italian *Poliuto* into the French *Les martyrs*). He was commissioned to compose *L'ange de Nisida* by the Théâtre de la Renaissance, for which he was also adapting *Lucia di Lammermoor*. But the theatre went

bankrupt and the opera was never performed: instead, Donizetti reused about half of the music in *La favorite*, premiered at the Opéra in 1840. The recent discovery of material by Italian musicologist Candida Mantica has enabled the score to be reconstructed. According to Parker, it is very different from *La favorite*. 'It's a semi-serious opera, with tragic ensembles and a deeply tragic ending, but with a part for a *buffo* bass – singing in French!' Elder adds that it's an intimate opera, and praises it for its subtlety and delicacy.

It sounds as though the audiences at Covent Garden, and the record-buying public, are in for a treat. Opera Rara is evidently on a roll, but all depends on the success of their ceaseless quest for financial support. 'I need to sit in a restaurant with a *bel canto*-loving Greek shipping magnate', says Elder with a grin, 'and tell him that this or that opera just must be done.' For *Tannhäuser* he probably needs more than one of these shipping magnates, but it wouldn't be a surprise if he and his colleagues managed to bring it off. **G**

OPERA RARA RECORDINGS TO SAVOUR

Italian and French operatic works, as well as a recital disc



Rossini:
Ermione
Carmen Giannattasio
sop Patricia Bardon
mez Paul Nilon,

Colin Lee *ten*s et al; Geoffrey Mitchell
Choir; LPO / David Parry

Opera Rara (12/10)

Based on Racine's *Andromaque*, this is for anyone who thinks of Rossini as simply a purveyor of light entertainment. Giannattasio gives a scorching performance as the deranged Ermione.



'Espoir'
(Berlioz,
Donizetti, Halévy,
Meyerbeer,
Rossini et al)

Joyce El-Khoury *sop*

Michael Spyres *ten*

Hallé / Carlo Rizzi

Opera Rara (10/17)

This recital, based on the repertoire of the 19th-century tenor Gilbert-Louis Duprez, includes a duet from Halévy's *Guido et Ginevra*: magnificent

music, magnificently sung by El-Khoury and Spyres.



Donizetti:
**Dom Sébastien,
roi de Portugal**
Vesselina Kasarova
mez Giuseppe

Filiani *ten* et al; Royal Opera House
Chorus and Orchestra / Mark Elder
Opera Rara (6/07)

Donizetti's epic last opera includes 'O Lisbonne, ô ma patrie!', a tender Romance for the poet Camoëns. It's beautifully sung by the baritone Carmelo Corrado Caruso.



Offenbach:
Fantasio
Brenda Rae *sop*
Sarah Connolly *mez*
Russell Braun *bar*

et al; Opera Rara Chorus;
OAE / Mark Elder
Opera Rara (11/14)

There's tenderness here, too, in this *opéra comique*. The trouser role of Fantasio is sung by Sarah Connolly, who duets exquisitely with Brenda Rae as Elsbeth.



PABLO HERAS-CASADO

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

La Mer / Le Martyre de saint Sébastien

Fragments Symphoniques

A century after his death on 25 March 1918, many harmonia mundi artists are eager to pay tribute to Claude Debussy, the magician of melody and timbre, the great 'colourist' and father of modern music. Alongside two shimmering masterpieces, La Mer and the celebrated Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, the Symphonic Fragments from Le Martyre de saint Sébastien receive loving attention from the distinguished musicians of the Philharmonia Orchestra, outstandingly conducted by Maestro Pablo Heras-Casado.

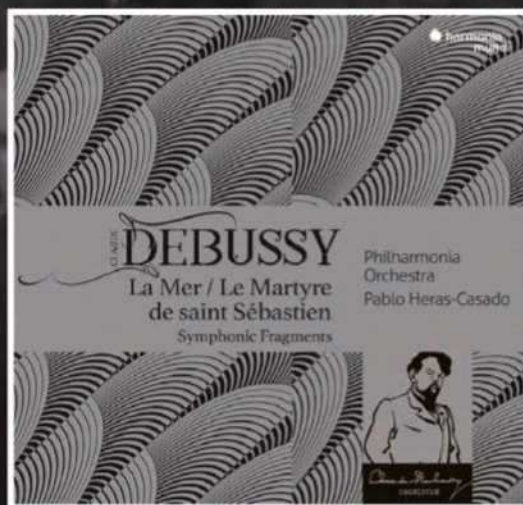


Photo © Fernando Sancho

HMM 902310



Time present & time past

The Marian Consort is
marking its 10th anniversary
with a recording combining
medieval music with a new
commission, as its director
Rory McCleery tells
Martin Cullingford

The reason I'm visiting Oxford is to watch Rory McCleery and his Marian Consort give the first performance of a new commission from Gabriel Jackson. What I didn't expect was that, a few hours beforehand, I'd also get to witness another Marian Consort first: the grand unwrapping of the first copy of their new CD. I meet McCleery, the genial conductor and countertenor who founded the ensemble 10 years ago, at the Porter's Lodge of Merton College, whose chapel will host the evening's performance, and where we discover a parcel has arrived for him. It's the Marian Consort's celebratory 10th anniversary disc, entitled 'In Sorrow's Footsteps'. There's something charming – and, particularly for an Editor of a recorded music magazine, rather pleasing – about the genuine delight with which the undemonstrative, softly spoken Scotsman beams with pride as he lifts out the first copy and opens it, admires the overall package, comments on the artwork, and swiftly hands me copy number two.

Merton is one of the Oxford colleges that claims to be the university's oldest (when you're talking 13th century, details can clearly get quite murky) and its chapel, completed not long after, has ever since echoed to the extraordinary historical development of a near millennium of choral music. CDs and recording sit right at the far end of that span of time, of course, as indeed do two of the works that feature on the Marian Consort's new disc, and which will be performed later in the evening – Gabriel Jackson's new *Stabat mater* and James MacMillan's *Miserere*.

Though even the older works on both the concert programme and the CD – Palestrina's *Stabat mater* (of 1590) and Allegri's *Miserere* (1638 – albeit with caveats, on which more later ...) – sit some way along that epic timeline.

Something old, something new, then – and, in the case of MacMillan's homage to Allegri, something borrowed – is very much the theme tying the programme together.

First, some background. The Marian Consort has emerged in recent years, not least on disc, as one of the finest of the young ensembles newly enriching the choral scene in the UK and beyond. Their fruitful relationship with the Delphian label has been enriching the catalogue too – most recently with a disc of contemporary Marian motets, and prior to that more contemporary music from Lennox and Michael Berkeley (about which critic Alexandra Coghlan praised 'their superb precision of pitch, impeccable rhythmic placing and beautiful diction'). Both of these were substantial steps forward in time from their previous releases, of the music of Gesualdo (whose life straddled the 16th and 17th centuries), of the 16th-century composer Jean Maillard, and of works that took us back evocatively to 16th-century Windsor Castle, and to Spain in the same era.

Like many a choral ensemble (including many of today's most prestigious), the group began at university, with the specific desire to explore the repertoire of the Renaissance, and a particular focus on one voice per part. An inaugural concert programme of Shepherd, Tallis and White was duly assembled, a date was fixed and a venue booked – at which point the fledgling group realised it needed a name. They came up with the Marian Consort, though, as McCleery puts it: 'The more we've lived with it, the more it seems entirely appropriate, because so much a *cappella* vocal music, from the Renaissance up

to the present day, sacred music particularly, but some secular as well, is either explicitly, or indirectly related to Mary.'

Ten years on, and the group is appropriately enough today marking its anniversary with the premiere of a newly commissioned setting of one of the greatest of Marian texts: the *Stabat mater*. Depicting the suffering of Mary as she witnesses and contemplates her son's crucifixion, the deeply personal and poignant text has been the subject of settings ever since its origins, dating from – neatly enough – the same century as Merton Chapel. Reflecting on the text, McCleery says: 'It feels almost painfully contemporary, in some ways, and so relevant. But also, what's lovely is that there is this arc to it, and there is this transformation. We go from the pain, and suffering, to acceptance. And then we have this hope, and looking forward and asking for intercession, and then eventually in the very last stanza talking about this hope of paradise and of achieving that, not in this life necessarily, but this hope that after all of this suffering that everything will be OK when we come out the other side.'

It was McCleery's idea that this was the text Gabriel Jackson should set, one that came to him after his immersion in that previously recorded Lennox Berkeley setting, and through which he came to realise 'how extraordinary and fascinating a text it is, and how many dimensions there are to explore within it'. McCleery has known Jackson for a long time – 'more than half of my life, which is extraordinary if you think about it. His music has always been quite prominent in my personal landscape of choral music. At St Mary's Cathedral [Edinburgh – where McCleery was a chorister, and where he sang on a recording

of Jackson's songs], there was an emphasis on his music, and since then, I've been very much aware of his writing. Gabriel was delighted and very keen, and so we met a couple of times – he's a wonderful raconteur, so

we'd meet for lunch, and then two hours later we'd realise we needed to talk about the piece!' Their obvious personal affinity soon extended to a musical one. 'He has known us, and been to Marian Consort concerts, and knows the sound of our voices and the ethos of what the group is about. It was a wonderful level of trust, so I just let him go away and get on with it.'

We talk a little about the balance needed, when commissioning composers, between being clear about what is wanted, but not being so proscriptive as to tie their hands creatively. But for Jackson, McCleery did have one particular request. 'I twisted Gabriel's arm into including a substantial soprano solo in the middle of the piece, which I felt was right because at least half of the work is pretty much, if not in the voice of, then narrating the experience of Mary. But also it allows us, as we tour the work this year, to work with children's choirs around the country.'

McCleery's idea was to have a truly flexible work, one that can be performed in concert but that can also slot neatly into the ensemble's outreach and educational work. The premiere this evening is entirely true to that ambition, featuring the Merton College Girls' Choir – newly formed just two years ago, drawing on singers from local schools and increasing the opportunities for girl singers in a choral world still weighted, certainly at the top end, towards boys.

The second contemporary work on the recording is James MacMillan's *Miserere* – a work that not only sets the deeply penitential Psalm 51, 'Have mercy upon me, O God', but explicitly references the famous Allegri setting, including direct quotations. That earlier starting point – Allegri's work –

'The Stabat Mater text feels almost painfully contemporary, in some ways, and so relevant' – Rory McCleery



McCleery oversees proceedings at Merton College Chapel, where his Marian Consort record works from both the 16th and 21st centuries

also features on the disc, and indeed an entire article could happily be devoted to the long though fascinating explanation McCleery offers me about the work's origins, and how the version that we know today owes as much to 19th-century hands as it does to those of Allegri back in the 17th century. Suffice to say though that this musicological journey has, for McCleery, placed the piece 'in the Anglican choral tradition, which is absolutely bonkers when you think about where it started, at the zenith of Catholic music-making, and the apogee of that in the Sistine Chapel for a really high holy day! Now it's become a staple of cathedral choirs across the land.' The recording uses McCleery's own edition, though for all his insight into the work's history, listeners can be reassured that it is 'essentially the one that everybody knows and loves' – complete with the full quota of soaring soprano high Cs.

'It's like looking at an object that you can never see fully, but in all of these different settings you get a different vantage point'

This diversion is not inappropriate. It encapsulates, in fact, something at the heart of the whole vision of the album. As McCleery explains, 'That's partly what the disc is about – the transformation of early music over time. It's not explicit in a kind of overly philosophical or academic way, but it explores our view of what early music is and our reception of it – and the juxtaposition of early and modern is part of that of course.' What unites everything is the simple – though profound – relationship between words, music and listeners. 'The texts themselves are so very timeless, because there are so many themes that resonate, because they are about the human experience. It's fascinating hearing both the ways in which the older composers set these texts using music that still seems relevant to us today, and which resonates on an emotional level, but then also hearing these much newer voices – MacMillan and Jackson of course – and their insights into the texts, and the way they bring that to life in their own compositions. It's like looking at an object that you

can never see fully, but in all of these different settings you get a slightly different vantage point of it and you see something you never saw in it before.'

The evolution of those vantage points has not just been musical, but contextual too – from works being part of an act of worship, to also now being part of a concert (albeit one in a church). But McCleery believes it's not quite so simple. 'It's such a fascinating

relationship between this music as pure art form and as functional liturgical music. But thinking of it as functional liturgical music is missing the point because it's always had the intended purpose to lift people out and beyond themselves, and to both involve them more deeply in the liturgy and to allow for contemplation of the subject matter of the text. And of course there are so many sides to this argument. But I think my view, which is slightly historically informed, is that it's very clear that this music has been performed both liturgically but also extra-liturgically, really since it first began.' He cites the motet as an example: 'The origins of the genre are outside of the liturgy really,' he says. 'It would have been a devotional performance, it would have been spiritual and sacred, and about focusing the mind to higher matters – but it wouldn't have happened inside the context of a church service.' Other examples McCleery cites include private performances of Byrd's music around the time of Catholic recusancy in England. Or the Italian courts in the 17th century, where a mixture of sacred and secular music was performed as entertainment, but also to offer an opportunity to reflect on text and on themes. 'So,' he concludes, 'there's never been a hard and fast line between what is sacred and what is secular, and what is a church service and what is a concert.'

To return to the modern era, how does that relate to a substantial new work such as Jackson's *Stabat mater*? 'It's quite clear that the Gabriel Jackson isn't necessarily a liturgical piece; while it would be wonderful if it were performed liturgically, I think it might be difficult to find a place for it because it's about 20 minutes long. But it's really just about trying to get inside the texts and understand what the composer is trying to say about them, and hopefully communicate something of that to a listening audience.'

'And then it's up to them as to what they take away from it, whether they enjoy it purely as art music – and we certainly wouldn't want to dictate how people want to listen – or whether the text and the music speaks to them in some way. And if it's a spiritual experience for them, that's wonderful. But I think we're essentially like any musicians – we really want to move people.' ⑥

'In Sorrow's Footsteps', on Delphian, will be reviewed next issue

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Fri 19.10.18
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More Mozart | Soloist: Jane Gower (bassoon)

Anima revisits four pieces by the genius as a twentysomething – from the dramatic *Symphony n°29* to the enchanting *bassoon concerto*.

Sat 09.02.19
20:00

Great Chamber Music | Guest conductor: Jakob Lehmann

In Schubert's *Octet* and the *Septet* by Swedish hero Franz Berwald, richness of sound mixes with intricate counterpoint.

Fri 08.03.19
20:00

Wolf, Mahler & Brahms | Soloist: Thomas Bauer (baritone)

A triptych in crescendo: selected songs with piano by Hugo Wolf, orchestral Lieder by Mahler and Brahms' *Symphony n°1*.

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Renée Fleming and Elina Garanča in Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (2017)

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A scene from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*



Sonya Yoncheva and Željko Lučić in Puccini's *Tosca* (2018)

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Anna Netrebko in Verdi's *Macbeth* (2014)

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

David Vickers relishes an imaginative programme from The Mozartists and Ian Page with music Mozart composed and may have encountered on a childhood visit to London



'Mozart in London'

Abel Symphony, Op 7 No 6 **Arne** Artaxerxes^a – Amid a thousand rocking woes; O too lovely. The Guardian Outwitted – O Dolly^b. Judith^c – O torment great; Sleep, gentle Cherub! **Arnold** The Maid of the Mill – Hist, hist!^d **JC Bach** Adriano in Siria – Ah, come mi balza il cor ... Deh lascia, o ciel pietoso^e; Cara la dolce fiamma^f. Berenice – Confusa, smarrita^e. Ezio – Non so d'onde viene^g. Harpsichord Concerto, Op 1 No 6^h **Bates** Pharnaces – In this I fear my latest breath^d **Duni** The Maid of the Mill – To speak my mindⁱ **Mozart** Va, dal furor portata, K21^g. Symphonies – No 1, K16; No 4, K19; K19a **Perez** Solimano – Se non ti moro a lato^j **Pescetti** Ezio – Caro mio bene, addio^j **Rush** The Capricious Lovers – Overture; Thus laugh'd at, jilted and betray'dⁱ ^{bd}**Rebecca Bottone**, ^f**Eleanor Dennis**, ^e**Anna Devin**, ^j**Martene Grimson**, ^c**Ana Maria Labin** ^{sops} ^a**Helen Sherman** ^{mez} ^g**Ben Johnson**, ^{bi}**Robert Murray** ^{tens} ^h**Steven Devine** ^{hpd} **The Mozartists** / **Ian Page** Signum ® ② SIGCD534 (145' • DDD • T/t) Recorded live at Milton Court, London, February 20-22, 2015

Ian Page and the Classical Opera Company (since rechristened The Mozartists for concerts) launched their epic project 'Mozart 250' with a weekend of events at Milton Court in February 2015. Aiming to be an ambitious 27-year survey charting the annual progress of Mozart's musical genius in context alongside works by contemporaries, they started with the Mozart family's 15-month visit to London in 1764-65 – a fertile period in the boy's creative development during which he could have experienced plenty of diverse music in theatres, concert rooms, pleasure



'This was a fertile period in the boy's creative development during which he could have experienced plenty of diverse music'

gardens and churches, and wrote his first symphonies and aria. Arriving only five years after Handel had died, music-making in the British capital city was thriving

thanks to native talents such as Arne (and others), whereas imported Italian operas at the King's Theatre featured music by Perez, Pescetti and most notably JC Bach – who was also pioneering public concert life in London in partnership with his compatriot CF Abel.

This double album is drawn from the copious amount of music recorded live across three days. There are excellent performances of some of the fledgling Mozart's London pieces interspersed among an abundance of rarely investigated repertoire that was researched and edited especially for the occasion; over a dozen of the pieces receive their premiere commercial recordings. Moreover, Page's knack for choosing interesting singers yields contributions from eight highly capable soloists.

A limpid sleep scene and an agitated heroic showpiece from Arne's oratorio *Judith* are sung with steely brilliance by Ana Maria Labin. Two airs from Arne's

Artaxerxes (revived several times during the Mozarts' visit) are performed with melodic intelligence and dramatic vivacity by Helen Sherman. Ben Johnson gives an authoritative account of the nine-year-old Mozart's first aria, 'Va, dal furor portata' (K21), and displays impressive range and tenderness in JC Bach's 'Non so d'onde viene'. Originally sung in Naples by Anton Raaff (later Mozart's first Idomeneo), this aria was rewritten for the London pasticcio *Ezio* (1764) – a motley entertainment that also featured Giovanni Battista Pescetti's 'Caro mio bene,



Ian Page directs the first instalment of an ambitious survey of Mozart's developing genius



The Mozartists are the star of the show, and offer classy support to a number of singers, including soprano Anna Devin

addio', sung in London by the castrato Manzuoli (who later appeared for Mozart in his Milanese opera *Ascanio in Alba*); there was a copy of this aria in the Mozarts' library at home in Salzburg, and it is performed emotively by Martene Grimsom. From Bach's *Adriano in Siria* (1765), Anna Devin masterfully portrays Emirena's anxiety and pitiful plight in 'Deh lascia, o ciel pietoso', and Eleanor Dennis's captivatingly sincere account of Farnaspe's 'Cara, la dolce fiamma' (with telling use of woodwind and horns) tastefully incorporates some of Mozart's own sets of embellishments written in Salzburg c1772-73. Rebecca Bottone and Robert Murray excel in several short operatic parodies from *The Maid of the Mill* (a pastiche based on Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela*), Arne's *The Guardian Outwitted*, George Rush's *The Capricious Lovers* and William Bates's *Pharnaces*, ranging from lighter-weight comic situations (the excessive ranting of the jilted lover Colin) to sentimental tragedy (a child imploring its mother to save it from death).

Nevertheless, the star of the show is the superb orchestra, which never sounds in the least bit perfunctory or formulaic.

The contrasting moods and articulations between the fanfare theme and sustained woodwind-tinged textures are aptly characterised in the opening of Mozart's Symphony No 1 in E flat (probably composed in August or September 1764). The final *Presto* of the Symphony No 4 in D, K19 (actually his second surviving symphony) has charismatic rollicking horns. Every contrapuntal detail of the string sections is delightful in the amiable *Andante* of the Symphony in F, K19a; rediscovered in Munich in 1981 but perhaps performed in one of Mozart's public London concerts in early 1765, it signals a significant development of his compositional abilities. JC Bach's Harpsichord Concerto in D (Op 1 No 6) is played with fantastic touch and élan by Steven Devine; his *cantabile* playing over pizzicato strings in the *Andante* leads into an entertaining treatment of 'God save the King' in the minuet finale (the 1763 publication was dedicated to Bach's pupil Queen Charlotte). This fascinating and thoroughly enjoyable journey concludes with Abel's Symphony in E flat, Op 7 No 6 (published 1764); it is easy to appreciate

why this attractive music full of charming passages for oboes and bassoon was formerly attributed to Mozart, whose own manuscript transcription of it has been preserved. Fingers crossed that The Mozartists will produce several more revelatory commemorations over the coming years until 2041. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Andrew Mellor digests the music of Sebastian Fagerlund:

'In Drift (2017) the pedal points no longer step up or down; they bend, twist, creak and falter into new positions' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



David Gutman finds charm in Dmitry Kitaenko's Stravinsky:

'Those averse to Stravinsky's spikier writing won't mind a certain decorousness about the music-making here' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**

Aulin

Violin Concertos – No 1, 'Concert Piece', Op 7; No 2, Op 11; No 3, Op 14

Ulf Wallin *vn* Helsingborg Symphony

Orchestra / Andrew Manze

CPO © CPO777 826-2 (76' • DDD)



Tor Aulin (1866-1914) had a tough life. He was three when his father died, his mother

was heartlessly strict, and by the age of 14 Aulin was required to make his own living. He played the violin in theatre orchestras at first; then, after studies with Emile Sauret, he went on to become Sweden's pre-eminent violinist. He was influential as a chamber musician and conductor, too, founding a string quartet and various orchestral societies. Sadly, as he entered his forties, health problems made both playing and conducting excruciatingly painful and, ultimately, impossible. At 47, he was dead.

Aulin didn't think much of himself as a composer, and his output is small, but the violin concertos are well worth getting to know. Sweetly tuneful and finely wrought, they're all stained with a delicate yet touching strain of melancholy that seems to reflect what we know of Aulin's personality. What's most striking about them, perhaps, is their conspicuous lack of flamboyance. The solo parts are elaborate and demanding, yes, yet even the most intricate passages convey a sense of expressive, musical purpose.

The lyrical First Concerto (1889), written for Sauret and published under the title *Concert Piece*, is an extended single movement whose connected sections are all in slow and moderate tempos. The Second (1892) shows a richer use of orchestral colour and a wider range of emotional temperature. Aulin loves the play of major and minor, and his frequent shifting between these modes helps give his music its distinctive flavour. The Third Concerto (1896) is the real gem, however.

Where some of the developmental working-out of ideas in the Second becomes repetitive, the Third is absorbing from start to finish. And with its subtly Nordic harmonic colouring, it's easy to hear this concerto as a stepping stone between Bruch's (an obvious influence) and Sibelius's. The dancelike finale is a veritable parade of delightful tunes.

These works have all been recorded before but I believe this is the first time they've appeared together on a single disc. I retain a soft spot for Arve Tellefsen's 1974 account of the Third with an incendiary Leif Segerstam (on a long-gone EMI LP), but Ulf Wallin is an equally effective advocate. He sneaks sinew into his silky tone where called for, and even finds moments of rapture in the music's reflective lyricism – try the end of the Third's slow movement, for example. Andrew Manze and the Helsingborg Symphony provide warm-hearted, characterful support and the recorded sound is excellent. Enthusiastically recommended. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

CPE Bach

Cello Concertos^a – Wq170 H432; Wq172 H439.

Symphony, Wq173 H648

^aJean-Guihen Queyras *vc*

Ensemble Resonanz / Riccardo Minasi

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2331 (53' • DDD)



There can't be many ensembles around as stylistically fleet-footed as Hamburg's Ensemble Resonanz. I'm still thinking fondly back to their Haas, Bartók and Berg programme on the Elbphilharmonie's opening weekend; and now here they are playing historically informed CPE Bach with equal musical sensitivity and intellectual panache, joined by their artist-in-residence Riccardo Minasi (himself a period-performance chameleon) and their other regular collaborator, Jean-Guihen Queyras. While this may be their first disc

on Harmonia Mundi with Minasi, they've already collaborated with him to record two sets of CPE Bach symphonies for Es-Dur. So when you top off this well-oiled CPE Bach outfit with one of today's finest and most thoughtful period-performance cellists, it's no wonder the results are magnificently fine.

Toolkit points first, and while Ensemble Resonanz's strings do 'do' gut, for this recording they've gone for the more brilliant-toned metal option. Interestingly Queyras has too, and the detailed attention he's paid to colouring every note puts paid to any notion that you need gut strings to present the full gamut of such subtleties.

The tempos are briskly flowing but never feel hurried; just enough to allow the dynamic swells applied to the opening of the A minor Concerto (Wq170) to feel like smooth waves; also to allow Queyras's semiquavers in the same movement to come over as crisp flutters and his triplet quaver figures to melt seamlessly together.

As you might expect from Queyras, he's written his own cadenzas. He's also been true to form with their length, because his A minor first-movement one is a luxurious two minutes; which incidentally is the exact-same length of his Haydn C major Concerto first-movement cadenza with Freiburg Baroque (10/04). Plus, while it's period-idiomatic for the most part, right near its start there's an attention-grabbing rising arpeggio sequence up into his upper harmonics that sounds subtly but deliciously 21st-century.

Splitting up the A minor and A major (Wq172) concertos, the ensemble and Minasi have committed another of Bach's symphonies to disc, this time an effervescent reading of his Symphony in G, Wq173: a masterfully crafted work written a decade earlier than the concertos, and possibly his first attempt at the fledgling string symphony genre.

So there are plenty of reasons to enjoy this. In fact, while I loved the punch and panache of Nicolas Altstaedt's recent recording for Hyperion of all three of the



Legendary transparency: Claudio Abbado bows out in style with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 2013

concertos, the sheer multicoloured class on display here – and indeed its symphonic palette-cleanser – has nudged it ahead in my personal rankings. **Charlotte Gardner**

Concertos – selected comparison:

Altstaedt, Arcangelo, Cohen (9/16) (HYPER) CDA68112

Beethoven

Triple Concerto, Op 56^a.

Clarinet Trio, 'Gassenhauer', Op 11^b

^bAndreas Ottensamer *cl* ^aGil Shaham *vn*

Anne Gastinel *vc* Nicholas Angelich *pf* ^aFrankfurt

Radio Symphony Orchestra / Paavo Järvi

Naïve © V5418 (55' • DDD)



The opening orchestral *tutti* seems to augur well for this new account of

Beethoven's Triple Concerto. I do miss the mysterious grandeur Fricisay conjures in his magisterial DG recording (10/61), but the Frankfurt Radio Symphony have an eager spring in their step, the brass and timpani punctuate with pleasing muscularity, and with the surprise shift of tonality at 1'25" Järvi shows an attention to expressive detail that's affecting without sounding affected.

The soloists don't let us down. Anne Gastinel shows no sign of strain in the treacherously high-lying cello part; her tone is unfailingly warm and sonorous from top to bottom. Gil Shaham is his usual sincerely musical, sweet-sounding self. And Nicholas Angelich wisely employs a light touch while applying slightly more rubato than his counterparts, which prevents the busy piano part from sounding too étude-like. With this abundance of technical finesse and musical tact, am I being churlish to feel vaguely dissatisfied? Lazić, Carmignola and Gabetta (Sony, 10/15) don't breeze through this obstacle course of a concerto nearly as easily, nor are the solo strings as well-matched in tone, but their reading is so vividly characterised. Take the opening of the Polacca finale, for example: Gastinel plays the tune flawlessly but Gabetta's phrases are longer-breathed; and, by paying greater heed to Beethoven's *sotto voce* marking, Gabetta creates a real sense of rapturous expectation. Then, of course, there's the aforementioned Fricisay and his dream team – Anda, Schneiderhan and Fournier – who give us gravitas with a grin.

In the first movement of the so-called *Gassenhauer* Trio, I was taken aback by how

freely Angelich, Gastinel and clarinetist Andreas Ottensamer play with the tempo, particularly following such a rhythmically sure-footed interpretation of the concerto. The featherweight, frothy texture they produce is delightful but, combined with Angelich's constant fussing over details, they seem to be skittering unsteadily over the music's surface. The musicians have a surer grip in the *Adagio*, although I do wish the phrasing wasn't so choppy. Jacqueline du Pré (EMI) phrases through the rests, as a singer would. And in the final set of variations, I find du Pré, de Peyer and Barenboim's *Gemütlichkeit* more gratifying than Gastinel & co's manic giddiness.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Berlioz · Mendelssohn



'The Last Concert'

Berlioz Symphonie fantastique, Op 14

Mendelssohn A Midsummer Night's Dream – incidental music, Op 61 (excs)^a

^aDeborah York *sop* ^aStella Doufexis *mez*

^aWomen of the Bavarian Radio Chorus;

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Claudio Abbado

Berliner Philharmoniker © ② BPHR160089

(96' • DDD/DSD • T)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin,

May 18-21, 2013. From BPHR160081 (3/16)

Vinyl edition: © ③ ● BPHR160082



Claudio Abbado stepped down from his post as

chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in May 2002 on the stage of the Musikverein, Vienna. Four thousand roses rained down on his departure. Just over a decade later he was back at the helm of the orchestra presiding over his very last concert with them, this time on home turf in Berlin. This is that concert: a typical Abbado programme twinning two musical alchemists as dazzling in their technique as they were jaw-dropping in their imaginations.

Mendelssohn was something of a *port bonheur* for Abbado throughout his career and it is self-evident from this, his final reading of the precociously brilliant *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture that it had lost none of its fascination and magic for him. Just the way he illuminates the harmonic ambiguity, the oblique dissonance, of those static woodwind chords of the introduction – knowing full well that there is mischief in the spell they cast.

The legendary Abbado transparency is evident throughout this account – a textural refinement that steers clear of preciousness and never draws attention to itself. What needs to be heard is heard. Fairies and mechanicals rub shoulders in rhythms as deftly pointed (the Scherzo) as they can be coarse and club-footed (Bottom's music in the Overture). The dreamy solo horn of the Nocturne is the more atmospheric for its simplicity.

It surprises me that Abbado had never performed Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* with the Berlin Philharmonic until this concert. It was, of course, a Karajan staple, a showy crowd-pleaser when he took the orchestra on the road. High levels of refinement were common to both. But Abbado's inherent good taste is apt to take precedent over Berlioz's somewhat hallucinatory characterisation and where you might want the trumpets to shine through a little more coarsely at the delirious climax of the opening movement (it is marked 'Reveries – Passions' after all) or the plushy Waltz to enjoy its opulence a little more, Abbado's nose for atmosphere can take us deeper into the composer's imagination than many of his peers.

The highlight of this performance for me is the movement I so often drift off in – the 'Scène aux champs'. Abbado could, better than most, find those elusive spaces between the notes and what he does here

is to conjure the concentration and distillation of nature transcendent. His own spirituality somehow plays right into the fabric of the music.

On the debit side, the gruesome showstoppers – 'March to the Scaffold' and 'Witches Sabbath' – don't hit the high end of the Richter scale for excitement. This may be an engineering issue but I want more 'definition' (certainly sharper brass) from both, I want the 'special effects' (grisly and comical) in higher relief rhythmically and texturally. The March is on the sluggish side, definitely wanting in cut and thrust, while all the grotesqueries of the finale (the glissandos, rollicking bassoons and trombones, skeletal *col legno*), though keenly heard, don't leap from the page in a way that is properly grotesque. Doubtless Abbado hated the V-word (vulgarity) but there's kind of a place for it here.

Of course, there are historical reasons for wanting this final performance released for all to hear and keep. But, that 'Scène aux champs' apart, it doesn't quite represent Abbado as we would hope to remember him – a conductor blessed with better instincts, better taste, better ears and more soul than most before or since. His recorded legacy contains many finer examples of his special talent.

Edward Seckerson

Brahms

Piano Concerto No 2, Op 83

Nelson Goerner *pf*

NHK Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo / Tadaaki Otaka
Alpha © ALPHA395 (50' • DDD)

Recorded live in Tokyo, May 20, 2009



Alpha is a label that gets ever more wide-ranging, as witness the discs of

Shostakovich chamber music (see page 63) and this live Brahms Second Piano Concerto that have come my way this month. The Brahms was caught live in Tokyo in 2009 and, at full price and with no filler, it needs to be special indeed to make its mark.

With Nelson Goerner you know you're going to get something intelligent and supremely musical and this Brahms is no exception. Tadaaki Otaka is clearly on the same wavelength, temperamentally speaking, and the NHK Symphony acquit themselves well. Goerner is quite forwardly placed in the acoustic mix so there's never any danger of him being swamped or having to fight to make himself heard. And the audience are supremely well

behaved, virtually inaudible until the applause at the end.

In a way, the audience's behaviour sums up the performance too: it's respectful, with everything very much under control – ironically, given it's live, you never feel the music is being pushed and pulled in the excitement of the moment. This approach serves Goerner & co well in the first movement, which is well paced and convincingly conveys a sense of the epic. But at the start of the Scherzo, how much more telling is Wigglesworth's way with the strings and horn phrasing, which is imbued with a dragging heaviness to which Hough responds with great immediacy. In the same movement, Otaka slows down at the *tranquillo e dolce* marking, a common enough tendency but not one marked in the score. If Joseph Moog is too driven in this movement to convey its full emotional clout, at least he doesn't succumb to the temptation to slow down at this point. That impetus and depth of feeling can be combined is brilliantly demonstrated in the classic yet ever-fresh Fleisher/Szell reading, still as vibrant today as it ever was.

The cello solo in the slow movement of Fleisher's account has a direct emotionalism that is very much in keeping with the performance as a whole. The cellist on this new recording sounds altogether more contented, which makes for a serenity that is matched by Otaka and Goerner. It doesn't come close to the soul-searching majesty of the other Nelson – Freire – in the company of Chailly. But Goerner's finale sets off with a nice impishness and the coda is triumphantly upbeat. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons:

Fleisher, Cleveland Orch, Szell

(8/64th) (SONY) MH2K63225

Freire, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Chailly

(9/06) (DECC) 475 7637DX2

Hough, Salzburg Mozarteum Orch, Wigglesworth

(1/14) (HYPER) CDA67961

Moog, Deutsche Rad Philb, Milton

(2/18) (ONYX) ONYX4169

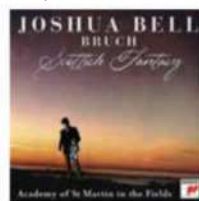
Bruch

Scottish Fantasy, Op 46.

Violin Concerto No 1, Op 26

Academy of St Martin in the Fields / Joshua Bell *vn*

Sony Classical © 19075 84200-2 (56' • DDD)



Joshua Bell was in his teens when he first recorded the

Bruch G minor and Mendelssohn concertos with Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin

in the Fields for Decca. Edward Greenfield in *Gramophone* praised Bell's 'rich tone, flawless technique and phenomenal articulation' but felt the performances ultimately lacked 'mystery', and that the violinist seemed 'almost too sure where he is going'.

Three decades on, in this new Sony recording of the Bruch Concerto (coupled this time with the *Scottish Fantasy*), the technical finesse and interpretative confidence Greenfield identified remain salient features of Bell's music-making, although he's greatly expanded his expressive arsenal. At the very opening of the concerto, for instance – so pristinely played in the Decca account – there's now more than a dash of gypsy soulfulness and spice. His tone fairly throbs with vibrato, ornately embroidered with portamento. How much warmer the *Adagio* is, too; less poised and aloof, more ardent and elastic.

This elasticity is perhaps even more crucial in the *Scottish Fantasy*, with its fancifully discursive solo part, and Bell's rubato feels natural and authoritative throughout. There's persuasive urgency as well as sweetness, for example, in his playing of the tune 'Through the wood, laddie' in the first movement (at 5'03"). And while his Scherzo feels stodgy compared with some rival accounts, I find the coy, almost sexy way Bell shapes the *grazioso* passage at 2'00" utterly irresistible.

I'll wager the stodginess results from Bell taking on the dual role of soloist and conductor. Certainly the unanimity of ensemble displayed here says a lot about the rapport he's established with the Academy since succeeding Marriner as music director in 2011. But, particularly in the Fantasy's Scherzo and finale, there's a nagging sense of caution in the orchestral playing – and the engineering only makes matters worse. Greenfield rightly complained about Decca's artificial spotlighting of the soloist, and we get more or less the same imbalance from Sony. Here, however, the Academy not only seem to be playing half a hall's length behind Bell but their tone is gauzily disembodied as well. Philips got the balance exactly right in a superb recording by Akiko Suwanai and the Academy under Marriner. And then, of course, Heifetz's dazzling accounts from the early Sixties still sound terrific.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Violin Concerto No 1 – selected comparison:

Bell, ASMF, Marriner (5/88) (DECC) 421 145-2DH

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Heifetz, New SO of London, Sargent

(10/62⁸, 3/63⁸) (RCA) 09026 61745-2

Suwanai, ASMF, Marriner (PHIL/DECC) 478 1149

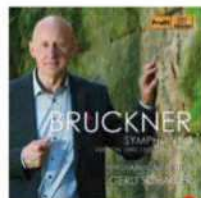
Bruckner

Symphony No 3 (1890 version, ed Schalk)

Philharmonie Festiva / Gerd Schaller

Profil © PH18002 (57' • DDD)

Recorded live at Ebrach Abbey, Bavaria,
September 17, 2017



Gerd Schaller has made something of a speciality of performing rarely

heard or forgotten Bruckner scores. This new recording of the Third Symphony (which is not included in Profil's recently released 18-disc compilation of Schaller's Bruckner recordings) features the version supervised by Bruckner's pupil and champion Josef Schalk and published by Rättig in 1890. Although almost never encountered these days, this was the only version of the symphony known to musicians and audiences for six decades, and was regularly performed by conductors such as Knappertsbusch, Schuricht and Szell well into the 1960s.

The published edition of 1890 is of dubious authenticity, however. Although Bruckner's 1889 manuscript contains amendments in the finale made by Josef Schalk's younger brother Franz, these are changes that the composer chose to retain as part of a thorough overhaul of the symphony. For this reason, the 1889 score of the Third Symphony is regarded as a legitimate document by Bruckner scholars and is regularly performed and recorded. The 1890 version, however, has revised dynamic and tempo markings, additional instrumental lines and a large number of slurs, none of which are attributable to Bruckner. Given the availability of more authentic options, I'm not sure what justification there is for performing the 1890 score.

Fortunately, the differences between the 1889 and 1890 scores are relatively minor in practice. Indeed, many of the modifications sound like the sort of differences normally heard in interpretations of the same work by different performers. Conversely, anyone familiar with the 1889 version might assume the unfamiliar dynamic swelling of the brass heard at 11'19" in the first movement is a feature in the 1890 score but it is in fact an element of Schaller's performance. As it happens, such interpretative quirks are unusual with this conductor. Schaller knows how to sustain the listener's interest while maintaining fidelity to the score, and how to encourage refined and sonorous playing from the

orchestra. Sanderling's distinguished 1963 account of the same score with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra has a degree more intensity and mystery, but the recording has a trace of distortion in climaxes. By contrast, Profil's recording offers excellent sound, presenting the orchestra with an attractive sheen and allowing textural detail to be clearly heard despite the six-second reverberation of Ebrach Abbey.

Christian Hoskins

Selected comparison:

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Sanderling

(3/08) (BERL) 0184152BC

Bruckner • Wagner

Bruckner Symphony No 7 (ed Haas) Wagner

Götterdämmerung – Siegfried's Funeral March

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Andris Nelsons

DG © 479 8494GH (77' • DDD)

Recorded live, March 2018



There was a time when collectors must have thought that the sublime outpouring

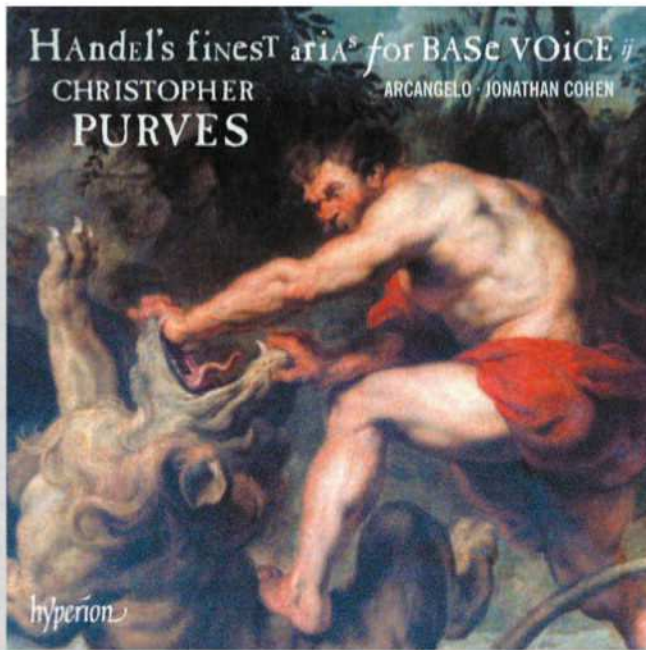
of grace and goodwill that is Bruckner's Seventh Symphony was one of those enviable creations that more or less plays itself. Would that it were so. Memorable recordings have been made in recent times – Blomstedt's 1980 Dresden version (Denon, 8/86 – nla) and Karajan's late recording with the Vienna Philharmonic – but how is it that so few latter-day conductors appear able to get line aboard?

And 'line' is the operative word, since it's not so much the often doleful tempos which undermine this newest recording as the apparent inability of conductor Andris Nelsons to establish that all-commanding pulse without which the inner weave of the music, its constituent parts thematically and harmonically, cannot cohere.

There are two ways of projecting the symphony's glorious first movement. One is to allow the famously long-breathed opening paragraph to establish the enabling pulse; the other is to allow this space while waiting for the B major subject, the movement's government-in-waiting, to move the music on at bar 51. Even so, the two tempos need in some sense to coexist, which they rarely do in this stop-start, often driftless Leipzig performance. Few performances of a symphonic first movement inspire confidence that end more slowly than they begin.

The slow movement's opening statement is taken as slowly as I ever remember it, the melodic contours limned as they might be by some over-earnest child in a tracing

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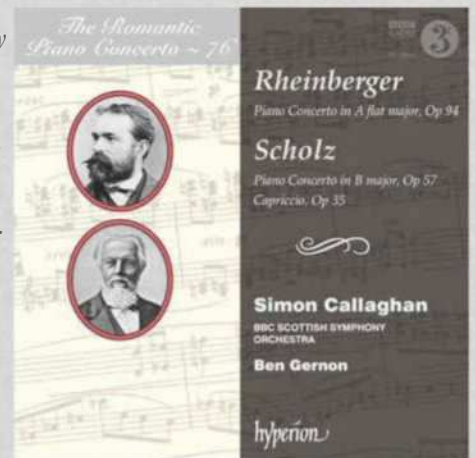


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The Lily & the Rose The Binchois Consort, Andrew Kirkman (conductor)
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exercise. There's sprightliness in the Scherzo and finale, but even here Nelsons overplays his hand, making the finale's titanic A minor episode more an interpolation than a bold but friendly intervention.

Is the problem that too much attention is being lavished on the orchestra (all those exquisitely sounded *pianissimos*) and not enough on the music? Or is it simply a misreading of this particular piece, as evidenced by the bizarre decision to preface this of all Bruckner symphonies with the Funeral March from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*? True, the great slow movement ends with a threnody written under the spell of Wagner's death; but that is no more than an episode in a work whose final movements are among the most joyous Bruckner ever wrote.

When Karajan conducted the symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic in London in 1962, a glorious performance happily preserved in excellent BBC sound on ICA, he played the *Meistersinger* Prelude (not preserved, alas) as an encore: programming born of instinct as well as knowledge.

Mention of that performance reminds me of another near-definitive account of the symphony, albeit a touch less robustly recorded and with less good Wagner tubas, recently recovered from a radio archive. It's a 1964 Salzburg Festival performance in which master Brucknerian Carl Schuricht conducts the Berlin Philharmonic. Put that in your player and I'd be amazed if you don't exclaim, 'So that's how the music's meant to go'. **Richard Osborne**

Selected comparisons:

VPO, Karajan (5/90⁸) (DG) 439 037-2GHS

VPO, Karajan (9/13) (ICA) ICAC5102

BPO, Schuricht (4/15) (TEST) SBT2 1498


Buene · Wallin

Buene Violin Concerto^a. Miniatures^a

Wallin Under City Skin^b. Appearances^a

Peter Herresthal *vn*^a **Arctic Philharmonic Sinfonietta**; ^b**Arctic Philharmonic Chamber**

Orchestra / Øyvind Bjorå

BIS (F)  BIS2242 (84' • DDD/DSD)



Norwegian contemporary music often gets overlooked (at least in the UK)

next to that from other Scandinavian countries, so this disc of works from two of its leading composers comes as welcome redress – not least when it highlights the playing of Norway's leading violinist.

Those who associate Rolf Wallin (b1957) with abstract poise and geometrical

precision may be surprised at the pieces here. Idiomatically reconceived from its viola original, *Under City Skin* (2009) places violin and string orchestra in the context of 'surround sound' to provide an evocative ambience over four sharply contrasted movements which reach a culmination in the gritty ostinato interplay of 'Locomotive', before this subsides into the balm of 'Pastorale'. *Appearances* (2003), heard in the version for 15 solo instruments, arguably leaves an even stronger impression as its motifs – simple in themselves – are metamorphosed via a process quixotic in its continuity but also memorable in its rhythmic shapes and glistening textures.

A noted critic and novelist as well as composer, Eivind Buene (b1973) has written extensively for electronic and improvised media, and this latter is discernible in the six *Miniatures* (2009), whose brevity belies a considerable expressive range from Webernian volatility to Ligetian irony, with a seamless continuity across the overall span. The three movements of his Violin Concerto (2016) can be played separately but the sequence is audibly cohesive as it unfolds from a prismatic agglomeration of detail, via a restive intermezzo, to a finale whose allusion to Bach's *Es ist genug* makes explicit the Bergian play on intervals and timbre at the outset.

The playing of the Arctic Philharmonic under Øyvind Bjorå is sensitivity itself but it is Peter Herresthal, whose disc of the Nørgård concertos (6/12) was such a revelation, that commands attention on this finely recorded and informatively annotated release. Warmly recommended.

Richard Whitehouse

O Davis

Liberty^a. Spiral^b. Bacchus^c. Morpheus^d.

Lost Lake^e. Sonar^b. Chillingham^f

^f**Grace Davidson** *sop*^{ab} ^f**Kerenza Peacock**,

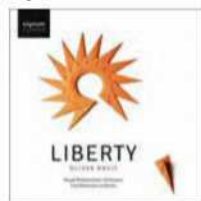
^e**Jonathan Hill** *vns*^f ^f**Emma Heathcote** *vn/va*

^a**Timothy Ridout** *va*^{df} ^f**Katherine Jenkinson** *vc*

^f**Oliver Davis**, ^{abd}**Huw Watkins** *pf*^{abcde} **Royal**

Philharmonic Orchestra / Paul Bateman

Signum (F) SIGCD522 (49' • DDD • T)



Oliver Davis is a lucky man. He enjoys the freedom to write whatever he wishes

and has released a new album called 'Liberty' to celebrate the fact. He's also fortunate in being able to call once more on an accomplished set of musicians – among them the violinist Kerenza Peacock,

pianist Huw Watkins, cellist Katherine Jenkinson and soprano Grace Davidson – to show off his music in such a positive light.

Yet, despite the fizz and sparkle that comes across so clearly in these performances, 'Liberty' struggles to find moments of real musical substance. Davis has a keen eye for catchy tunes, dancelike rhythms and pleasant tonal patterns while possessing all the skills of a very gifted orchestrator in managing to blend each element into a coherent whole. But there's something missing. The most effective moments appear in the atmospheric *Sonar* and impressive *Chillingham* – the latter comprising settings of three poems of Mary Elizabeth Coleridge wherein Grace Davidson inflects a whole range of beautiful shadings to her multitracked voice. It's perhaps telling that Davis is at his most original when either bringing elements of technology to bear on the recording process or when writing with the character of a specific performer in mind, as he managed to do so impressively with Peacock's violin on the 2016 release 'Dance'.

'Liberty' comes across mostly as either a set of glorified film cues (nothing lasts over five minutes) or, worse still, as a series of generic music library samples. Not that there's anything wrong with library music, of course, but one should perhaps expect more when it's being passed off as concert music in the form of 'cello concerto' and the like. Freedom isn't always a guarantee of quality. As Stravinsky himself is purported to have said: 'The more art is controlled, limited, worked over, the more it is free.' Davis should take note.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Debussy

Le martyre de Saint Sébastien –

fragments symphoniques. La mer.

Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune

Philharmonia Orchestra / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi (F) HMM90 2310 (57' • DDD)



Yet another *La mer* rich in detail (there have been quite a few of late), the *ppp* timps at the beginning ideally clear, the *pp* basses too, as are the pizzicatos from 2'18" into the same 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer'. Cellos throughout have great warmth of tone and high percussion blends well within the overall texture. In 'Jeux de vagues', how nice to hear the cymbal quietly hissing away behind the harps

(5'30") and in 'Dialogue du vent et de la mer' there's the clarity – and impact – of the bass drum. You hear everything, which is half the problem: for the duration of Pablo Heras-Casado's brilliant performance (the playing itself is marvellous) I kept thinking to myself, 'great that I'm hearing so much – but should I be aware of all this detail simultaneously?' I felt as if set upon by each incoming wave, so much to take in and yet so little sense of perspective or atmosphere. But impressive it most certainly is.

Prelude à L'après-midi d'un faune enjoys a degree of tonal bloom that suits its very personal narrative. Heras-Casado spins a believable sense of fantasy, as if a loved one is being viewed – maybe even reinvented – through a syphon of memory. Best of all are the *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* fragments, where Heras-Casado focuses the music's haunted, introverted spirit. The final climax in 'Danse extatique' (the second fragment) recalls the sun-drenched eruption at the apex of *Daphnis et Chloé*'s 'Daybreak' and there are more *Daphnis* premonitions (from earlier in the ballet) in the mysterious shimmering of the fourth fragment, 'Le Bon Pasteur'. Early Bartók and late Wagner are also somewhere in the frame. Heras-Casado makes you realise just what a great score this is, and – as with the other pieces on the disc – the Philharmonia are in fine fettle. Wonderful sound, too. In closing I'd say that if *La mer*'s textural (and textual) explicitness sounds as if it might appeal, then you certainly won't be disappointed by its excellent programme companions. **Rob Cowan**

Delius · Grieg

Delius Piano Concerto^a. On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring (transcr Warlock)^b. Three Preludes Grieg Piano Concertos^a – Op 16; sketches for No 2 (arr/orch Matthew-Walker)
Mark Bebbington, ^bIrene Loh pf^a Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Jan Latham-Koenig
 Somm © SOMMCD269 (75' • DDD)



Concertos by Grieg and Delius form the twin pillars of Mark Bebbington's new Somm release in collaboration with the Royal Philharmonic conducted by Jan Latham-Koenig. These are supported by Grieg's sketches for his never-finished Second Concerto in B minor, realised by Robert Matthew-Walker, who also contributes the elegant, informative booklet notes. Bebbington rounds out the programme with Delius's Three Preludes,

published in 1923. Finally, with Irene Loh, he plays *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* in a four-hand transcription made in 1913 by the 19-year-old Peter Warlock.

Though Bebbington now has some 25 recordings to his credit, this was my introduction to his work. His beautifully cultivated sound at the instrument is especially striking. Despite his ear for the smallest detail, he easily conveys a sure grasp of larger structures. He possesses an inviolable kinetic sense that will not be rushed and his rubato is generous without seeming indulgent. The life of the phrase is always his first commitment.

These qualities combine to make Bebbington's Grieg A minor Concerto very persuasive indeed. The opening *Allegro* culminates in a genuinely heroic stance, free of stentorian bluster, though the drawn-out tremolando cadential figures strike me as less than convincing. Following a poetic take on the spacious *Adagio*, the finale has plenty of crisply rhythmic verve, alternating with affecting lyricism.

The less familiar Delius Concerto offers greater play for Bebbington's interpretative imagination and he meets its considerable virtuoso challenges with ease. This concerto also provides a more decisive role for the orchestra, amply filled by Latham-Koenig and the RPO. In both the concertos and the sketches for the B minor Grieg, microphone placement seems a bit distant, though this is not a major distraction.

Freshness and spontaneity characterise the fleeting Three Preludes, making one wish Delius had left more piano music.

Patrick Rucker

Fagerlund

Drifts. Stonework. Transit^a

^aIsmo Eskelinen gtr

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu
 BIS © BIS2295 (50' • DDD/DSD)



Sebastian Fagerlund's residency at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam

culminated in April with the third part of his orchestral trilogy in which *Stonework* and *Drifts*, included here, form the first two. Fagerlund is honing his craft with immense speed and the two works show it. *Stonework* (2015) is a little more obvious and mechanical in every sense, built on stable instability: pedal points and horizons judder into position in counterpoint, each provoking or determining a shift from the

other and charging the orchestral churn taking place in between. But there is a certainty to this tectonic ballet even at its most ominous.

Fast-forward two years to *Drift* (2017) and strong winds are blowing uncertainty into everything. Those pedal points no longer step up or down; they bend, twist, creak and falter into new positions. We hear something of that horrifying, cold grandeur that characterised Fagerlund's magnificent opera *Autumn Sonata* (2016) and the composer's ability to whip up his layered harmonies to cataclysmic effect. To my ears, he broadens the distinctive orchestral style forged by Magnus Lindberg but, aided by that close harmonic grind, humanises it at the same time.

Lindberg's influence is obvious and there are many elements of Fagerlund's music – nature references, dual velocities, pedal points – that are distinctly Finnish. Another is the guitar's orbiting around a single note at the start of the concerto *Transit*, a particularly fascinating sound as the instrument tricks the ears into a southern European mindset.

There are moments of similar awesomeness to those found in the two preceding works, notably in the concerto's third-movement (of six) *Espressivo*. Against the big orchestra, the guitar is as a small creature fascinated by the wide, bold world in which it finds itself. The second-movement *Intenso* is more or less a free cadenza laid over static strings; the recurring ritornello of *Ritmico* an interlocking dialogue between three elements. Both put Fagerlund's broader processes under a microscope. Ismo Eskelinen's delicate glissandos are full of sensitivity. The Finnish RSO are just as piquant but sound magnificent when Fagerlund throttles up, as only he can. His is often highly calorific and thrilling music; but the concerto proves that it's the music itself, not just its sound, that's worth our attention. **Andrew Mellor**

Gershwin · Ravel

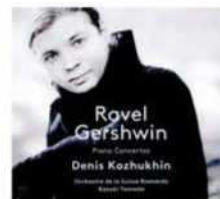
Gershwin Piano Concerto

Ravel Piano Concertos – in G; for the Left Hand

Denis Kozhukhin pf

Suisse Romande Orchestra / Kazuki Yamada

Pentatone © PTC5186 620 (75' • DDD/DSD)



Like many of the young musicians of the post-Soviet diaspora, Denis Kozhukhin naturally sought out Russian teachers in the West, but not exclusively.



Vladimir Ashkenazy and composer-cellist Mats Lidström bring a vocal quality to Shostakovich and Lidström's own Rigoletto Fantasy – see review on page 48

Though an unshakeable Russianness is at the core of his musical personality, to a greater degree than many of his contemporaries who have spent significant time outside their homeland, Kozhukhin seems open to Western influences. He has become cosmopolitan, in the best sense of the word. It's an attribute that is immediately discernible in his new Pentatone release of Ravel and Gershwin concertos.

From the sparkling, perky opening measures of the Ravel G major Concerto, it's clear that a remarkable performance is in store. In a work that, in lesser hands and imaginations, can seem a patchwork of influences, Kozhukhin fully inhabits Ravel's protean topoi with the dextrous ease of a quick-change artist. The *Adagio assai* unfolds with an unguarded simplicity that goes straight to the heart with the accuracy of a heat-seeking missile. Despite all the precision, drollery, constantly shifting colours and breathtaking speed of the finale, one affect is prevalent: tremendous fun. Yamada and the OSR musicians are the lithe participants and, on occasion, enablers of this exhilarating performance.

The Concerto for the Left Hand, so different from the G major Concerto in style and intent, is given a performance

where poise, emotional resonance and clarity exist in perfect symbiosis. Kozhukhin's opening cadenza may be heroic in posture but its heroics are tempered by reason. Somehow, a fundamentally French sense of proportion pervades this interpretation. This doesn't preclude, however, flights of the most delicious fantasy. In the extended solo before the final *tutti* (14'46"), it is as though we struggle free of terra firma, with its mock militarism and grand apotheoses, rising towards the higher regions, beyond care, unfettered, guided only by the wind. There's no way to describe it other than exquisite piano-playing.

With both Ravel concertos spot on, it's perhaps inevitable that the Gershwin falls a bit short of the mark. Certainly the orchestra seem to have wandered beyond their comfort zone, and even Kozhukhin's best efforts can't get the act completely back on the road. It comes off as more dutiful than brash, swaggering and unabashedly sentimental. In this instance, better check out the recording by Lincoln Mayorga with the Harmonie Ensemble/New York under Steven Richman (Harmonia Mundi, 9/16).

That said, the Ravel concertos are worth the price of purchase and then some. Don't miss it. **Patrick Rucker**

Ivanovs · Karlsons

'1945'

Ivanovs Symphony No 5

Karlsons Music for Symphony Orchestra, '1945'

Latvian National Symphony Orchestra /

Andris Poga

Skani © LMIC/SKANI062 (56' • DDD)



The year 1940 was a dramatic one for Latvia. The country was overtaken by the

Soviets, then the Nazis, then the Soviets again. The Fifth Symphony of Jānis Ivanovs (1906-83), written after the brutal winter of 1944-45, contains music that might be thought to reflect this cultural and political confusion, but he was reticent in the extreme, saying only 'This contains everything that had accumulated over those years'. As the detailed booklet notes by Orests Silabriedis explain, the subsequent career of the symphony was ambiguous in the extreme: the only remedy is actually to listen to the music.

It's a powerful, brooding work. While it might at the time have been seen by some to be under the shadow of Shostakovich, and while that element is not entirely

absent, perhaps especially in the first movement, the work is a good deal more than such a characterisation might suggest. Ivanovs's melodic style is very much his own, and the orchestral textures, notably in the second and fourth movements, are also highly individual. Nevertheless, while the performance is more than committed, it is a difficult work to love; its author's fingerprints notwithstanding, it seems to be, in spite of its supposed content, a work lacking a genuine voice.

Juris Karlsons (b1948) was a pupil of Ivanovs, and his work was commissioned for the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War (or the Great Patriotic War, as it was known in the Eastern Bloc) in 1985. The programme included Ivanovs's Fifth Symphony. Karlsons's brief work was written as an evocation of the period; and while beautifully scored, in most respects it still seems a hostage to the stylistic imperatives of that time – even in the accordion-coloured waltz it is difficult to sense the quotation marks. But the final minutes of the work are luminous and full of hope, something the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra under Andris Poga understand very well indeed. **Ivan Moody**

Lidström • Shostakovich

Lidström Rigoletto Fantasy

Shostakovich Cello Concerto No 1, Op 107

Mats Lidström vc **Oxford Philharmonic**

Orchestra / Vladimir Ashkenazy

BIS (P) BIS2289 (60' • DDD/DSD)



Mats Lidström's *Rigoletto Fantasy* (2009) was inspired by

hearing his violinist classmates at the Juilliard School argue the relative merits of Sarasate and Waxman's *Carmen* fantasies. He considered making his a Bizet-based potpourri but wisely turned to Verdi's opera instead. Not only are the tunes just as famous but the title-role is better suited to the cello's baritone range. The solo part isn't limited to Rigoletto's music alone, mind you. Lidström gives a grand tour – although the order's scrambled – including both of the Duke's arias, Gilda's 'Caro nome' and the Act 4 quartet. He mostly retains Verdi's original orchestration but has composed succinct transitional passages (some a bit too abrupt, I think), as well as a startlingly Straussian introduction, and – of course – fancifully virtuoso elaborations of the vocal lines.

At 30 minutes, Lidström's Fantasy is more than twice the length of Sarasate's

and Waxman's, yet it doesn't overstay its welcome, largely because his ornaments and additions stand solidly on the emotional foundation of Verdi's musical characterisations. Listen, for example, to how effectively octave-writing in the solo part for 'Cortegiani vil razza' conveys Rigoletto's raging misery. As imaginative and delightful as many of Lidström's flights of fancy are, he ultimately stays true to the opera's tragic tone.

Perhaps because I had echoes of Verdi's opera still ringing in my ears, I was struck by the distinct vocal quality of Lidström's playing in the Shostakovich. These two works seemed like very strange bedfellows on paper; but time and time again in the concerto I was reminded of Rigoletto's tormented laments. Lidström favours slightly more measured tempos than my benchmark recordings – Rostropovich (Sony, 9/60) and Schiff (Philips, 10/85) – sacrificing some of the music's bite in the outer movements but sustaining an intensely grim lyricism throughout. Nothing is prettified. Note the gruff doggedness of his playing at 4'55" in the opening *Allegretto* or his choked tone at 7'57" in the *Moderato*.

The Oxford Philharmonic have a few shaky moments in the *Rigoletto Fantasy* but Ashkenazy has them dig into the Shostakovich with gusto. BIS's SACD recording is atmospheric and richly detailed, with the crucial celesta part ideally balanced in the concerto.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Mahler

Symphony No 5

Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra / Adam Fischer

AVI Music (P) AVI8553395 (70' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Tonhalle, Düsseldorf,

March 31 – April 2, 2017



Adam Fischer's kinship with this music seems to grow exponentially with

each successive instalment of what is already proving an exceptional Mahler cycle. There's a stylistic and emotional understanding which goes beyond the precisely annotated scores. It has to do with instinct and temperament, a conductor's most precious attributes; and it has to do with the alchemy with his orchestra – the Düsseldorf Philharmonic – who punch way above their weight and whose characterisation always feels spontaneous, never schooled. Perhaps the most impressive thing about this

account of the Fifth Symphony is the 'in the moment' feeling it engenders from first to last.

And so the nerve-racking trumpet fanfare portends an altogether different kind of funeral march where the evenly unemotional melody it proffers (a mistake to make it obviously expressive) is in violent contrast to the crushing drum rolls which punctuate it. There's a degree of detachment in Fischer's delivery. And then comes the central release of the movement, a howl of anxiety and derision as intense and overwrought (and ruthlessly clear – woodwind detail, rarely heard, coming through vividly) as Mahler's shock tactics are wont to be. The reediness of the march's return is chillingly effective with the ensuing implosion of the music somehow inevitable.

Fischer rightly makes something very dramatic of the *attaca* into the second part of the 'twinned' first and second movements, the latter a darker, angrier, flip-side of the first with all its sudden disintegrations and vain attempts at lyric relief. The solo cellos' episode here is deeply wistful, inward-looking. But the turbulence prevails in inky black saturations of sound. The terrible burden of emotion that Mahler and Fischer convey at 10'33" with all the strings in their lowest chest registers is harrowing in a way that only Bernstein in his famous Vienna Philharmonic recording dares to underline so emphatically. All of which makes the one hopeful moment of brightness in the movement – the premonition of the symphony's sunny coda – the more exultant.

The core of the symphony – the extraordinary Scherzo – is, of course, what truly separates the real Mahlerians from the impostors. The cardinal sin here is to hurry. It's all about taking Mahler at his word and finding space in and around the sound to allow one perspective to open on to another in reverie and awe. As the solo horn (not credited) and its stopped 'echo' summon each other across the valleys there's that rustic, slightly tentative, awkward pizzicato passage into which Mahler has his solo oboe hesitantly (or 'shyly', as he marks it) offer his or her take on one of the movement's key tunes. Fischer makes magic of the whole episode, and as this particular Ländler grows cosmic and the horns once more reach for the stars it's as if all nature stops to listen. There really hasn't been a more telling account of this movement since Bernstein and it is a tribute to the Düsseldorf players that they can muster so much of the instinctive tradition of their Viennese counterparts.

Another aspect of Fischer's Mahler that invites comparisons with only a select few is the improvisatory nature of the phrasing: all those complex and challenging rubatos that are the syntax of Mahler's very particular musical language. The shapely *Adagietto* is just that, fluid and pliant in its songfulness. It is graceful and heartfelt, and not at all over-upholstered in terms of speed or sound. But nor has someone taken a stopwatch to it. It takes as long as it takes (around 10 minutes) as if it's created in the playing of it, with moments like the attenuated phrase leading to the glissando sigh sounding fresh and surprising.

The finale, too, is light on its feet and I particularly note the way in which the *adagietto* material is aerated and made to dance – rhythmic and elegantly turned but muscular and exultant in the big climaxes. The coda is properly thrilling, with Fischer allowing himself a fabulously expansive release.

This is one Mahler symphony where there is a clear and enduring recommendation: Bernstein's VPO account on DG is pretty peerless. But the fact that Fischer comes even close is testament to his empathy with this music. I can't wait for the symphonies to come. I feel sure that he won't disappoint. **Edward Seckerson**

Selected comparison:

VPO, Bernstein (8/88) (DG) 423 608-2GH,

459 080-2GX16, 477 5181GB5, 477 6334GGP

or 477 8668GB11

McLeod

Out of the Silence^a. Percussion Concerto^b. The Shostakovich Connection^c. Hebridean Dances^c

^bDame Evelyn Glennie *perc*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra /

^aHolly Mathieson, ^{bc}John McLeod

Delphian (F) DCD43196 (66' • DDD)



The booklet gives no birth date for John McLeod but the composer's biography dives straight in with the impetus behind his music's colour, exuberance and fantasy: studies with Lennox Berkeley and Witold Lutosławski. Here we have a percussion concerto, two single-movement orchestral works and the *Hebridean Dances*, all but one conducted by the composer.

This is my first taste of McLeod's music but that doesn't mean there aren't familiar moments here. *Out of the Silence* pays homage to Carl Nielsen and *The Shostakovich Connection* to the Russian composer. There are canny stylistic references in each but the huge cut-and-

paste quotes from those composers' symphonies tend to undermine any sense of the homage being a subtle or truly responsive one.

They also add to the feeling that the works here are more interested in music history than they are in art, life, the world around us or even John McLeod. Just when the orchestral argument starts to freewheel with help from those disciplined, Lutosławski-imbued mechanics, the composer tends to stop short of delivering something to raise the music beyond the level of a refined study.

Nor does a tendency to fall back on generic, stock gestures help us make a distinction. In the Percussion Concerto – a form still finding its feet in 1987 – the novelty of the genre only exacerbates that problem (McLeod is far from alone here). But only to a point. We glimpse McLeod at his most bold and thrilling when the orchestra steps away for the soloist's cadenzas and he addresses the array of solo instruments without the excess baggage of some orchestral or compositional tradition or other. And that, in summary, explains my frustrations with much of the music here, born of an evidently gifted craftsman who could tell us more about his own talent and outlook and less about other people's.

Andrew Mellor

Mysliveček

Three Violin Concertos^a.

Sinfonia in E flat. Overture No 2

^aLeila Schayegh *vn* Collegium 1704 / Václav Luks

Accent (F) ACC24336 (73' • DDD)



Josef Mysliveček (1737-81) seems to have been quite a fellow. A close

friend of the Mozarts and a major influence on the young Wolfgang, he travelled widely, spending time in Italy, where he became known as 'Il Boemo' and even 'Il divino Boemo'. Mozart also recounts in a letter how an incompetent surgeon had managed to burn off Mysliveček's nose while treating him; Leopold's reply insinuated that his illness was the unfortunate result of a promiscuous lifestyle. He was also a spendthrift and died aged only 43, destitute, in Rome.

The music is just as colourful as the life, if not quite so memorable. These three violin concertos (dating from shortly before Mozart's), a symphony and an overture reveal him to be fond of the dramatic gesture but a little short on melodic invention, often relying on scalic or

arpeggiated figures and sequential repetition of phrases. However, he clearly had an imaginative approach to chromatic harmony and there are plenty of chains of suspensions to maintain tension.

He had an ear for scoring, too: the slow central movement of the A major Concerto presents a high-lying cantilena over an accompaniment of just upper strings *senza basso*, while the *Allegro con brio* that opens the three-movement A major Overture makes telling use of pairs of middle strings. The D major Concerto and the E flat Sinfonia darken proceedings with minor-key slow movements.

Collegium 1704 exhibit the sensitivity and vivacity that has characterised their Zelenka explorations, while Leila Schayegh's focused, vibrato-light tone is ideal for these concertos, whose solo line lies mainly in the sweet upper register but on occasion exploits the woodier lower regions of the violin. The music is worthwhile above all for its composer's craftsmanship and offers a glimpse of what sort of sounds Mozart would have had in his head as he embarked upon his own youthful violin concertos. **David Thresher**

Nono • de Assis

de Assis unfolding waves ... con luigi nono^a

Nono Como una ola de fuerza y luz^b.

... sofferte onde serene ...^c

^bClaudia Barainsky *sop* ^{bc}Jan Michiels *pf* ^cPaulo de

Assis, ^aAndré Richard, ^bReinhold Braig *sound*

projection ^bSWR Experimentalstudio *elec*s

^aWDR Symphony Orchestra / ^{ab}Peter Rundel,

^aLéo Warinsky

Kairos (F) 0015022KAI (59' • DDD • T/t)



Recordings of Luigi Nono have increasingly focused on his highly

introspective late music, which makes this disc featuring two of his most representative earlier works more welcome. Both were conceived for Maurizio Pollini, whose pioneering accounts have long held sway.

In the instance of *Como una ola de fuerza y luz* (1972), the notion of a piano concerto became combined with a memorial to the Chilean activist Luciano Cruz in a piece whose four continuous sections alternate between plangent exhortations for soprano and tape or combative interplay for piano and orchestra. Confrontational in a manner typical of middle-period Nono, its most striking section, 'The Long March', brings an ascent from the depths through to the

heights of the orchestra in itself electrifying (as was confirmed by a BBC studio reading two decades ago) while anticipating the exploration of sound which preoccupied Nono in the years ahead.

Such exploration is evident in ... *sofferte onde serene* ... (1977), a meditative if by no means tranquil piece for piano and tape that unfolds not so much in waves as eddying layers where acoustic and electronic sources fuse as well as exchange their identities to a transformational degree. Jan Michiels is an assured exponent and his reading is the first to use a reconstructed stereo tape that affords a presence and lustre not heard since Pollini's account four decades ago.

Having prepared the critical edition of this piece, Paulo de Assis (*b*1969) also undertook an orchestral realisation. With its scoring for spatial forces itself inspired by Nono's later music, *unfolding waves* ... *con luigi nono* (2012) is akin to a sonic X-ray that opens out the original's content in new and unexpected ways. It makes a thoughtful end-piece to a disc that, complete with diagrammatic overviews of each work, is a valuable addition to the Nono discography.

Richard Whitehouse

Nono – selected comparison:

Pollini, Bavarian RSO, Abbado


(7/74⁸, 6/79⁸) (DG) 423 248-2GC

Pettersson

Symphonies – No 5; No 7

Norrköping Symphony Orchestra /

Christian Lindberg

BIS (F)  BIS2240 (83' • DDD/DSO)



I doubt whether many in the audience at the premiere of Pettersson's Seventh

Symphony (1966-67), 50 years ago this autumn, could have dreamt that a half-century later it would be receiving its fifth recording. In a climate where most forward-looking commentators were declaring that the symphony as a form was dead, Pettersson (a not unknown but fairly marginal figure) could hardly have hoped for one. Of course, the first followed quickly – by those premiere performers, the then Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Antal Dorati (5/72 – sadly *nla*) – bringing this work and its composer to international attention. The benchmark recording, this is how I came to know the work and have been in its thrall ever since.

Dorati's is the fastest on disc and – until now – the most urgent, gripping in ways

that eluded even Comissiona, Pettersson's other great early champion, and Albrecht; Segerstam's account (the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra's previous recording of the work) loses impetus as it progresses. The Seventh has needed a good modern recording for some time, and finally it has one. Only a minute behind Dorati, Lindberg gets the pacing absolutely right, even while taking a different line, quicker and more urgent at the outset, almost taking my breath away where his predecessors do not. The Norrköping players are once again on superb form, responding to Lindberg's advocacy just as keenly; but then this music is in their blood.

This understanding shows also in their compelling account of the Fifth (1960-62) – its fourth recording – a performance of complete authority which the valiant competition from Berlin, Malmö and Saarbrücken could not achieve. It also made a mark at its premiere in 1963 but not such a popular one. Lindberg's understanding of the idiom may be incontestably the deepest of any previous interpreter; but what caught my ear as much in both symphonies was the orchestral balance, with so much of the detail coming through as never before.

Simply wonderful. **Guy Rickards**

Symphony No 5 – comparative versions:

Malmö SO, Atzmon (2/91) (BIS) BIS-CD480

Saarbrücken RSO, Francis (4/07) (CPO) CPO777 247-2

Berlin Sibelius Orch, Kähler (BLUE) ABCD015

Symphony No 7 – comparative versions:

Norrköping SO, Segerstam (4/94) (BIS) BIS-CD580

Hamburg St PO, Albrecht

(10/94, 4/07) (CPO) CPO999 190-2 or CPO777 247-2

Swedish RSO, Comissiona (CAPR) CAP21 411

Rachmaninov

Piano Concerto No 3, Op 30^a.

Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op 42

Boris Giltburg *pf* Royal Scottish National

Orchestra / Carlos Miguel Prieto

Naxos (M) 8 573630 (62' • DDD)



Sometimes the reputation of a piece of music becomes so

ensconced that the music itself is enshrouded, infected by hearsay and frozen with preconceived ideas, becoming ossified, monumental, fixed. The piece gradually morphs into a looming feature of the landscape, a challenge to be conquered, so that planting a flag on its summit becomes both a badge of professional honour and an end in itself. The music cools, the molten

human expression coursing through it hardens into veins of marble and the work stands, impenetrable, implacably resistant to personal interpretation. To a degree, the Fifth Concerto of Beethoven is such a work, as is perhaps Liszt's *Totentanz*. Certainly for decades Rachmaninov's Third Concerto has been burdened, along with the second concertos of Prokofiev and Bartók, as part of a triumvirate of 'most difficult' among canonic 20th-century concertos. Listening to it, we are more prone to be awestruck by the pianist's technical skill than moved by either the depth of interpretation or a strikingly individual conception.

Boris Giltburg's new Naxos recording of the D minor Concerto with Carlos Miguel Prieto and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra shatters the encrustation of reputational habit, offering instead a vividly imaginative re-creation of a score that lives and breathes with irresistible vitality. Giltburg's approach is fundamentally lyrical, rhetorically apt and, aided and abetted by Prieto and the Scots, sensitive to every marking in the score.

The first movement unfolds with the simplicity of a folk tale, bringing to mind Rimsky-Korsakov's fairy-tale operas, where subversion simmers beneath a guileless exterior. It's a tale of heroism surely, but not a martial one; abundant energy never grows hectic. The famous cadenza, which so easily devolves into a display of stentorian force, here remains expressive, the rich harmonic changes luminously articulated.

A rigorous psychological complexity takes centre stage with the Intermezzo. Exchanges between soloist and orchestra become a dialogue, occasionally argumentative, all sheathed in gossamer, dreamlike poetry. The piano's peremptory command quells the orchestra's blandishments in an almost shockingly abrupt transition to the finale. Once launched on this trajectory, there's no looking back. After a dazzling kaleidoscope of imagery and affects, all described with a microscopic precision, the final peroration arrives in a glorious effusion that is, for once, not anticlimactic, but the inevitable and necessary conclusion to heartfelt human discourse.

Following so much sonic and textural richness, the *Corelli* Variations at first seem fragile. To Giltburg's great credit, he is able to retract the lens and draw our attention to the smaller scale of Rachmaninov's exquisite craftsmanship.

Nevertheless, the concerto remains the centrepiece of this beautifully engineered recording. In place of Cliburn's sensually



Irresistible vitality: Boris Giltburg, with the Royal Scottish Orchestra under the baton of Carlos Miguel Prieto, is imaginative and lyrical in Rachmaninov

beautiful sound or Horowitz's feline nervous energy, Giltburg gives us thoughtfully conceived rhetoric, with an unerring focus on Rachmaninov's shrewd harmonic movement rather than a succession of dazzling figuration. Human scale, naturally sculpted phrases and pliant rhythms compellingly invite our reconsideration of this formidable artwork.

Patrick Rucker

Sibelius • Saint-Saëns • Stravinsky

'Live in Montréal'

Saint-Saëns Introduction et Rondo capriccioso,

Op 28^a Sibelius Violin Concerto, Op 47^b

Stravinsky Duo concertant^c

Ayana Tsuji *vn* ^aPhilip Chiu *pf* ^bMontreal

Symphony Orchestra / Giancarlo Guerrero

Warner Classics © 9029 57029-0 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Salle Bourgie, Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, May ^a24 & ^a27, 2016;

^bMaison Symphonique, Place des Arts,

Montreal, May 31, 2017



The Japanese-born violinist Ayana Tsuji was 18 years old in May 2016 when she

won first prize in the Concours Musical International de Montréal, but you wouldn't know it from her debut recording. Perversely, for a release intended to celebrate a major new talent, the booklet contains no biographical information about Tsuji, although we do get a photo of her wearing all six of her gold medals and beaming, as well she might.

Because the performances captured on this disc – each taken live from a different round of the competition – really do speak eloquently. As a programme, it's bizarre. As a portrait of the artist, however, it's highly effective, and I'd suggest starting with the Saint-Saëns, performed with the pianist Philip Chiu. The first impression is of enormous assurance: rich-toned and suitably zigeuner-ish on the low notes of the Introduction, and then brilliant, poised and delightfully playful in the Rondo. Tsuji throws high notes away with nonchalance and accelerates gleefully into runs. It's properly capricious, and feels like a live performance rather than a test-piece, fully meriting the storms of applause at the end.

That same confidence and electricity permeate a skittish account of Stravinsky's *Duo concertant*: Tsuji and Chiu pay the

music the compliment of not taking it entirely seriously. Besides these two performances, the Sibelius sounds slightly more reserved – as if Tsuji is slightly overawed by Giancarlo Guerrero's broad, storm-swept orchestral accompaniment – though the unshakable poise, gleaming sound and (in the finale) that hint of a rhythmic kick and a sparkle in the eye are still all there. Where does a young violinist as impressive as this go next? It'll be fun to find out. Richard Bratby

Stanford

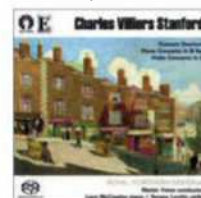
Violin Concerto^a, Piano Concerto^b.

Concert Overture

^aSergey Levitin *vn* ^bLeon McCawley *pf*

Royal Northern Sinfonia / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7350 (70' • DDD/DSD)



There's no question what constitutes the main course here and what the hors

d'oeuvres. Stanford's D major Violin Concerto dates from his time in Leipzig and counted among its consultants none other than Joseph Joachim. Despite the shadows of Mendelssohn and Schumann,

the score represents the Irish composer at his clipped, neat best, where restraint fuels both nobility and rapture.

The concerto's 16-minute opening movement, framed by stuttering, tripping ideas from soloist and orchestra respectively, includes a fantasy development of novelty and charm. The 14-minute Intermezzo carries an atmosphere of reposeful fortitude, like a person sitting quietly yet thinking ferociously. After a rigorous cadenza that movement tumbles into a freewheeling *Allegretto scherzando* finale, a rare example of a composer from these islands putting a convincing stamp on an established central-European design. Sergey Levitin, best known as Covent Garden's co-concertmaster, revels in the music's sturdy vigour and meets its technical challenges but his tone is neither particularly rich nor sweet.

Dutton claims the recording a 'world premiere', which may refer to the edition by conductor Martin Yates; otherwise a fine version exists from Anthony Marwood and Martyn Brabbins, and Hyperion's sound probably has the edge on Dutton's, which is a little brittle. The unnumbered Piano Concerto of 1873, a precursor to Stanford's three mature examples, does appear to be a newcomer. As Jeremy Dibble's rich but diplomatic booklet notes suggest, it's less ambitious and far shorter than its concertante bedfellow here but interesting to hear despite its rather bloodless piano-writing and lack of sweeping momentum. Leon McCawley does his best with it. But, as in the Concert Overture of 1870, it's in the small details – enchanting writing for winds and miniature adventures in tonality – that we sense a composer getting into his stride. **Andrew Mellor**

Violin Concerto – comparative version:

Marwood, BBC Scottish SO, Brabbins
(2/01) (HYPE) CDA67208

Stravinsky

The Firebird – Suite (1919 version)^a.

Petrushka (1947 version)^b

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Klaus Tennstedt

LPO Ⓜ LPO0105 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,
May '85 & '10, 1992



Klaus Tennstedt's isn't the first name to come to mind when thinking about Stravinsky's ballets – granitic Beethoven, Bruckner and Mahler were more his fare

during his tenure as principal conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra from 1983 to 1987. Yet these performances of *Petrushka* (1947 version) and the *Firebird* Suite (1919), recorded in the Royal Festival Hall in May 1992, are enjoyable, affectionate accounts.

Tennstedt's *Petrushka* has a rugged feel, the Shrovetide lumbering along like the dancing bear which intrudes on the action in the fourth tableau. The orchestra really digs into the score, relishing its earthy, folklike qualities. Tennstedt juggles the simultaneous different metres for Moor and Ballerina carefully. He is, however, in direct competition with the LPO label's own 2015 performance under Vladimir Jurowski, currently steering the orchestra through a fascinating Stravinsky series. Comparative listening reveals Jurowski to be swifter, tauter, his pinpoint direction drawing out every nuance. Jurowski is also aided by a much more clinical recording highlighting instrumental detail.

The 1919 *Firebird* Suite is – forgive the pun – a slow burn of a performance. Tennstedt drags the Khorovod out to extreme length, really stretching out the opening phrases, although the LPO woodwind team cope admirably. The Berceuse is suitably somnolent, bassoon and oboe coiling sleepily around each other. However, the *Firebird* herself trips along delicately and the Infernal Dance is full of pulsating drive. Both Iván Fischer (with his Budapest Festival Orchestra) and Myung-Whun Chung (at the Bastille) have cockier trombones, but Tennstedt gets a strong performance. Enthusiastic applause is retained after *Firebird*, unsurprising given its grand finale.

Mark Pullinger

Petrushka – selected comparison:

LPO, Jurowski (9/16) (LPO) LPO0091

The Firebird – selected comparisons:

Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer

(5/12) (CHNN) CCSSA32112

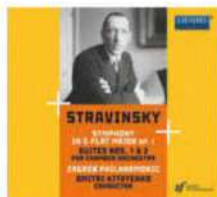
Bastille Op Orch, Chung (DG) 478 3375GB

Stravinsky

Symphony, Op 1. Suites – No 1; No 2

Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra / Dmitry Kitaenko

Oehms Ⓢ OC1888 (48' • DDD)



The variably transliterated Dmitry Kitaenko continues his Indian summer in the company of musicians with whom he has been associated as artistic advisor

and regular guest conductor since 2011. On this evidence their playing is nicely turned rather than supercharged but then the programme scarcely lends itself to earth-shattering revelations. Stravinsky's early Symphony (1905-07) is very much a student work, the influence of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov more noticeable than any premonitions of modernism. The score betrays scant awareness of Wagner, Liadov, Scriabin or Rachmaninov, unlike Stravinsky's recently unearthed *Chant funèbre* or *Funeral Song* (1908). Kitaenko ensures that it sounds pleasant enough but there's more space, character and drive in Antal Dorati's Detroit account (Decca, 9/86).

The two Suites, extrapolated in 1921 and 1925 from wartime piano duets, again display considerable charm. Those averse to Stravinsky's spikier writing won't mind a certain decorousness about the music-making here which perhaps fails to tell the whole story. Kitaenko is certainly slower and less pungent than the composer himself in his concert performances of the 1950s.

This pleasant, non-standard fare is captured in the ripe, sonically accommodating style Oehms has previously perfected in Cologne with Kitaenko and the Gürzenich Orchestra. Although playing time is ungenerous – the duration given for the opening *Andante* of the Suite No 1 (track 5) is out by a factor of 10 – it helps that booklet notes are provided in both German and English. The design is attractive too. **David Gutman**

Telemann

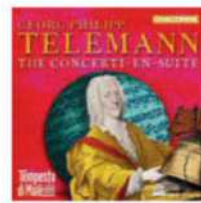
'The Concerti-en-suite'

Concerto-Suites – TWV51:F4; TWV54:F1.

Concerto da camera, TWV43:g3

Tempesta di Mare / Gwyn Roberts, Richard Stone

Chandos Chaconne Ⓢ CHAN0821 (63 • DDD)



Much as the classification 'concerto-suites' does very strongly suggest 'contents as described on the tin', some may yet find it useful to know that these are works in which a soloist or soloists is presented first in an opening *allegro* and then in a series of French dance movements. Telemann's three surviving ones display some of his most imaginative work, too, even within the context of his music already being such a melting pot of German, French, Italian and Polish

musical ingredients. Bravo then to Tempesta di Mare for not only recording them but for being the very first ensemble to bring all three together on the same disc.

The programme is nicely weighted, too, its central position occupied by the sparsest-scored and most intimate Chamber Concerto in G minor, TWV43:g3, allowing us to be played in and out by its pair of F major big guns. So first, TWV54:F1; think fanfares, extravagant scoring and a feast of soloists: two horns, recorder, oboe, bassoon and two each of concertante violins and cellos. Best moments here include the Minuet's Trio, with its delicate woodwind and brass interplay reconstructed by theorbist Richard Stone after extant horn parts. Then there's the equally celebratory TWV51:F4, whose own top brass-versus-woodwind moments include a perkily virtuoso conversation in the *Allegrezza* central Trio (track 14, 1'08"), which has had me rewinding for multiple encores.

TWV51:F4's first movement has an interesting feature, too, in the form of an indication for improvised cadenza from the solo violinist; not something Telemann had provided in his earlier concertos. Concertmaster Emlyn Ngai's one is satisfyingly thoughtful; not without panache but also with true emotional light and shade.

Honestly, though, while I've picked a few favourite moments, it's all top-drawer stuff. Not least thanks to the beautifully blended sound of the whole: crisp strings, mellow woodwind, subtle-but-there harpsichord and theorbo and a gorgeous soft-focus halo of horns. In short, every instrumental timbre is beautifully looked after. As is every personality-rich note of Telemann's.

Charlotte Gardner

'Concertante!'

Danzí Sinfonie concertanti – in E flat (arr E Bodart)^a; Op 41^b **Devienne** Sinfonia concertante No 2^c **Mozart** Sinfonia concertante, K297^b^d **Pleyel** Sinfonia concertante No 5, B115^c

^a**Les Vents Français** (^{bc}Emmanuel Pahud fl

^{cd}François Leleux ob ^{bd}Paul Meyer cl

^{cd}Gilbert Audin bn ^{cd}Radovan Vlatković hn)

Munich Chamber Orchestra / Daniel Gliglberger
Warner Classics (M) 2 9029 57048-7 (117) • DDD



The *sinfonia* (or *symphonie*) *concertante* developed mainly in the orchestral centres

of Mannheim and Paris and, the informative booklet tells us, often closed a concert, so the emphasis is on light-heartedness – more concerto than symphony, then. These five works are fine examples of the form, none of them plumbing any particular depths but each providing pleasant diversion.

Virtuosity too, and it would be hard to find a more able, agile and fluent ensemble than Les Vents Français to do full justice to them. Paul Meyer's clarinet, especially, gurgles, giggles and dances through works by Danzi, Devienne and Mozart, and Radovan Vlatković's horn-playing ranges from eloquent *cantabile* to breathtaking acrobatics. Both Mozart and Devienne spin sets of variations in their finales, allowing each instrument its turn in the spotlight.

Franz Danzi displays classical grace in his E flat Sinfonia, arranged in the 19th century for wind quintet instead of quartet, while his Op 41 in B flat for flute and clarinet is melodious in a Weberian fashion. François Devienne darkens the tone in the minor-key central movement of his F major work, even if it is interrupted by the minuet finale after less than a minute and a half. Ignaz Pleyel's work is terser, erring perhaps more towards Haydn's style than Mozart's. And Mozart's work itself is naturally the finest of all, notwithstanding doubts as to its authorship. It gets a performance as fine as any you're likely to hear, from its majestic opening movement, via the sheer beauty of its *Adagio*, to the playful wit of its finale. The Munich Chamber Orchestra provide attentive accompaniment but it is the performances by this unparalleled group of soloists that mark out this exquisite pair of discs.

David Thresher

'Latin Winds'

Chávez Chapultepec^a **Rodrigo** *Adagio*^b.

Per la flor del lliri blau^b **Villa-Lobos** Concerto grosso^a. *Fantasia em três movimentos em forma de chôros*^a

Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra /

^a**Mark Heron**, ^b**Clark Rundell**

Chandos (P) CHAN10975 (66) • DDD



The five works on this engaging disc from the RNCM Wind Orchestra are all rooted in the strong Spanish or South and Central American band tradition, though we owe the existence of three of them – Rodrigo's *Adagio* and both pieces

by Villa-Lobos – to commissions from the American Wind Symphony Orchestra of Pittsburgh, while a fourth, *Per la flor del lliri blau*, is Rodrigo's own 1984 arrangement of an orchestral work written some 50 years previously.

The music itself is uneven. Villa-Lobos's Concerto grosso meanders a bit, particularly in its big prelude-and-fugue finale, when placed beside the tauter *Fantasia em três movimentos*. *Per la flor del lliri blau* – based on a Valencian ballad about three brothers, who search for a magic healing flower, then turn on each other when they find it – is imposing in its narrative sweep, but the arrangement is densely and unvaryingly scored until we reach the closing funeral march, when the relentless brass panoplies give way to sorrowing woodwind phrases over a rocking harp ostinato.

The performances, though, are consistently good, and the playing is fresh and exciting throughout. Clark Rundell and Mark Heron share the conducting honours. Heron tackles the two Rodrigo pieces with considerable flair. He can't quite disguise the sense of overload in *Per la flor del lliri blau* but both the way he ratchets up the cumulative tension and the precision of the RNCM brass are thrilling. Elegant woodwind, and a melody that echoes the slow movement of the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, open the *Adagio*, though its title proves something of a misnomer, since the melody's serene course is suddenly interrupted by jazzy brass and percussion riffs.

Rundell, meanwhile, conducting the pair of works by Villa-Lobos, is keenly alert to their complex instrumentation and constantly shifting textures and rhythms. The solo quartet in the Concerto grosso play with exemplary poise and plenty of wit, particularly in their intricately crafted quadruple cadenzas. *Fantasia em três movimentos* is particularly fine with its chattering woodwind and suave brass. Rundell also conducts *Chapultepec*, Carlos Chávez's arrangement of popular songs from the Mexican revolution, which forms the closing track and serves as a bravura encore to what has gone before. Exhilaratingly done, it rounds off an entertaining and most enjoyable disc.

Tim Ashley

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Bruch's Scottish Fantasy

Joshua Bell tells *Charlotte Gardner* about the challenges of the piece 'that's got everything'

The inventor of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, once claimed: 'We can't blame the technology when we make mistakes.' Still, while I must give technology some credit here for even making it possible to do an interview remotely between London and New York, I'm pretty sure it was neither Joshua Bell nor myself who was to blame for our nicely set-up video conference not giving us the video bit, or for the FaceTime connection not to work, or for Skype to decide early on that it was more important for me to see my own face than Bell holding his score.

But the wonderful thing about Bell's relationship with Bruch is that all these technical shenanigans don't matter one jot when we actually resign ourselves to the situation and start talking about the *Scottish Fantasy*, a work which acts as the partner piece to what is Bell's second recording with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields of Bruch's Violin Concerto No 1. That previous effort, you may remember, was the first concerto Bell ever recorded, all the way back in 1986 when he was still a teenager, under the baton of Sir Neville Marriner, and paired with the Mendelssohn. 'It was one of those situations where I was thrown into a studio with no rehearsal, and the light turned on, and they said, "Start playing";' Bell remembers. 'It was fine, but over the years I've always wanted to re-record it.' Bell directs both works from his violin this time too, which he tells me brings a whole new life to the experience.

This is Bell's first recording of the *Scottish Fantasy*, though, and as we turn to its first page he tells me: 'It's a piece I've only been playing over the past decade or so, but I've loved it since I was a kid. It's got everything. It starts with what feels like a funeral march in a very unusual key, E flat minor, and the violin enters with this sustained note that comes from the shadows of the fog. It really grabs you instantly with its beauty, and it's not just a beauty that's about pretty melody either; I really feel that the piece has great depth. It bothers me when people separate works like this from the Brahms and the Beethoven and try to call it lighter music. The orchestration is masterful – Bruch uses the strings in an incredibly lush and beautiful way – and his use of *pianissimo* is too; and on top of all that he uses the harp, which is so unusual for a violin concerto.'



Joshua Bell recording Bruch with his old friends, the ASMF



I point out that the work's original 1880 title was 'Fantasy for Violin with Orchestra and Harp, freely using Scottish Folk Melodies'. 'Yes,' Bell says, 'and it's clear that it's really often a duet between the violin and the harp. Consequently, I always like to bring the harp up close to me onstage, where I can have eye contact with the harpist, and I did that for the recording too.'

The first page is also a natural opener when it comes to discussing tempo. 'Bruch's metronome marking for the *Grave* is very slow,' Bell points out. 'However, even at that slow tempo, it needs an inevitability and a rhythm,

and that's a mistake that I think people often make; they think that when things are slow, rhythm doesn't happen anymore.'

He continues: 'There's a lot of dynamic push and pull in this movement. Bruch seems to have been very fond of these emotional outbursts. At bar 56, for example, after a *pianissimo*, the orchestra crescendos in the space of half a bar to this beautiful *forte* line and then drops back down again.'

Has Bell followed the dynamic and tempo markings to the letter across the movement? 'Most of the tempo markings feel right,' he responds, 'but the one I'm suspicious of is the 84 to the eighth note at the *Adagio Cantabile*, because at that tempo the music doesn't flow at all. Furthermore, at bar 54 the harp has running notes which are supposed to be flourishes, and if it's too slow you end up hearing them note by note. It's like looking at a pixilated picture. So, although this isn't a decision I've taken lightly, this is one instance where I've decided to let the music itself dictate what's right.'

When we move on to the second-movement Scherzo, Bell gets a bit 'scherzo' himself. 'Yeah, it's a lot of fun,' he enthuses with warmth. 'It comes in right after you've basically ascended to heaven with the first movement, so I really like the orchestra to grab it by the scruff of its neck.' He continues: 'It's very important to me to get the orchestra to do the 'snap' [a distinctive rhythm prominent in Scottish folk music], because that snap is what really gives it the Scottish feel.' He turns the page: 'Actually I even like to compress those pairs of quavers at bar nine, so that it doesn't feel too metronomic. This is every bit as important when the dynamic is soft, too – for instance the strings' *piano* at bar 75, and then at bar 77 when it drops to *pianissimo*; they sound like a troupe of dancing mice, which is very effective!'

The violin also has some nice duetting with the woodwind in the form of little dovetailed runs, I point out, flicking through the score. 'Yes, with the flute from bar 141, and that's one of the hardest things to get together in the entire piece,' Bell says. 'It starts out as this kind of playful flirtation between them, before finally they get together – rolling up and down the hills, perhaps! But it's boring if you say, "Well let's just be metronomic because then we'll be together". Instead, you want it to feel like you're pushing and pulling against each other. It's such inventive writing – I don't know anything else in the repertoire like this.'

'Bruch's orchestration for the Scottish Fantasy is masterful. He uses the strings in an incredibly lush and beautiful way'

We move on to the slow movement, whose solo lines Bell aims to play as if a regular person were breaking into folksong – in other words, he explains, it shouldn't sound too polished. The movement also turns out to contain what he thinks might be his favourite moment in the whole piece, when 'the horn takes the melody at bar 20, and the violin has this incredible improvisational obbligato around it'.

As we hit the final movement I comment on its unusual 'guerriero' (or 'warlike') direction, which, interestingly, mirrors Mendelssohn's instruction for the final movement of his *Scottish* Symphony. 'It's warlike but it's also a dance,' Bell affirms. 'I imagine this representing a kind of Rob Roy-type era where they're going out to war with this weird mixture of seriousness melded with a sense of celebration. It's a lot of notes, though, including several big, four-note chords. Which means that if you don't play it well – with a ringing tone and lots of bow – it ends up sounding ugly and angry.' He laughs. 'In fact, when we were kids some people called this piece "Scratch Frantically". But I like the sound of the four-note chords, and I encourage the members of the orchestra to play them as I do. I like the full sound of them playing as many notes as possible. In Beethoven symphonies you have that a lot too. I'm not a big fan of use of *divisi* unless you really need it.'

We turn to the work's final pages. 'It winds down with a little memory of the first-movement tune', says Bell, 'but it's *pianissimo*, like an echo. And of course Bruch could have ended the whole piece like that, but instead he throws in one last heroic *fortissimo* romp – but even though it's a romp I find it very sentimental. So it ends in a very satisfying way.'

► To read our review of Joshua Bell's Bruch recording on Sony, turn to page 42



CKD 482

'Baritone Jacques Imbrailo and pianist Alisdair Hogarth highlight the similarities and contrasts in this delightfully nuanced recording.'

— THE SCOTSMAN



CKD 566

'Søndergård and the BBC NOW should be considered an important voice of Sibelius...'

— HI-FI+



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Chamber



Andrew Farach-Colton listens to Mendelssohn's cello sonatas:

'Lydia Artymiw's rhythmic energy and pellucid tone is an effective foil for the mellowness of Marcy Rosen's playing' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



Harriet Smith hears Shostakovich from Anderszewski and the Belcea:

'The certainty of ensemble is one of the joys of the Belcea Quartet, but just as important is their fearlessness' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**

Biber

Mystery (Rosary) Sonatas

Christina Day Martinson *vn*

Boston Baroque / Martin Pearlman

Linn ② CKD501 (120' • DDD)



It's 18 months since I reviewed all the available recordings of this wonderful cycle

(Collection, 1/17), an experience that has stayed with me since. This new offering steers a middle course between a cornucopia of instrumental extravagance on the continuo (Letzbor or the more focused Tur Bonet) and the purists, who – arguably correctly – forego the bowed string bass altogether (Manze, Lotter). Boston Baroque's continuo group has a keyboardist (organ and harpsichord), a plucked string player (theorbo and guitar) and a cello. This last is the greater surprise, and one of the set's disappointments: a viol is generally lighter on its feet and its strings resonate more easily, so that the player doesn't have to work as hard to keep things moving. The interplay between the soloist and the continuo group is key to carrying this cycle convincingly but here the continuo is earthbound and gives Christina Day Martinson little energy off which to feed.

The cycle begins well, with welcome ornaments and interpretative tweaks in the repeats of dance movements, but after a while these seem to tail off, so that one misses them all the more. Day Martinson's approach is deliberate and careful but missing the variety of tone-colour and phrasing that the programmatic element calls out for; and where Biber's technical demands come thick and fast (try the cross-string polyphonies, for example at the start of 'The Nativity', or the *saltando*/legato of the very last variation of 'The Coronation of the Virgin'), things are not as secure as one might wish. At just over two hours, this is one of the longer performances on disc of the past few years, and although this isn't unreasonable given the soloist's solid tone,

in the passacaglias and chaconnes the sense of line struggles to transcend the individual units (try, however, the welcome speeding-up near the end of 'The Presentation in the Temple'). But just as a friend of mine holds that you judge an Indian restaurant by its onion bhajis, so do performances of this cycle stand or fall by the closing solo Passacaglia. Here, the distraction is straightforwardly technical: the violin's open third string is nicked so often that the producer ought surely to have allowed retakes. **Fabrice Fitch**

Brahms

Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 78; No 2, Op 100; No 3, Op 108. Auf dem Kirchhofe, Op 105 No 4.

Regenlied, Op 59 No 3. Wie Melodien zieht es mir, Op 105 No 1

Sirkka-Liisa Kaakinen-Pilch *vn* Tuija Hakkila *pf*

Ondine ② ODE1315-2 (75' • DDD)



This is the third period-instrument recording of Brahms's violin sonatas I've heard, and by far the most illuminating.

I admire the delicacy of Natalia Grigorieva and Ilia Korol's playing on Challenge Classics, though not their choppy phrasing. Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov are fleet, flexible and at times thrilling in their abandon, even if, in his ardour, Melnikov occasionally overwhelms his partner. Indeed, theirs are performances for the concert hall. Here, Kaakinen-Pilch and Hakkila take a more intimate approach; the music's dramatic moments are still seized upon but it's all smaller-scaled and more confessional, which – as the pianist explains in an exceptionally thorough and thoughtful booklet note – makes sense for these works.

I have mixed feelings about Kaakinen-Pilch's tone, which tends towards the wiry. There's a fineness to it that's attractive in its focus and suggestion of vulnerability but at times I simply wanted more richness. The return of the first theme in the

Andante of Op 100 (at 5'00"), for example, feels precariously fragile, not the consolatory *dolce* Brahms asks for. On the other hand, she plays the *Adagio* of Op 108 with a lovely singing tone – similar, in fact, to the expressively articulate way she plays the arrangements of the three song arrangements that are musically connected with the sonatas. Her double-stops are particularly eloquent. Listen at 4'08" in the opening movement of Op 78, where they're like heartfelt pangs.

Hakkila is a marvellous Brahmsian, although she eschews the traditional hearty style that reminds us of the burly, bearded fellow in photographs. Instead, her light touch and pliable, long-breathed phrasing give the music unusual fluidity and buoyancy. I'm enthralled by the rhythmic springiness she brings to the normally weighty passage at 3'06" in the first movement of Op 100, and the breathless, feathery quality of her playing at 1'50" in that sonata's finale. She uses two instruments: an exquisitely mellow 1864 Streicher for Op 78 and a more resonant 1892 Bösendorfer for the later works (Korol uses a Streicher and Melnikov a Bösendorfer for all three).

Whatever slight misgivings I have about the violin's tone, I have none about this partnership. The intensely intimate atmosphere of this recording is due in large part to Kaakinen-Pilch and Hakkila's ability to breathe and move together. Theirs is a refreshing, unified view of these sonatas, and one I expect to return to again with grateful pleasure. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Violin Sonatas – selected comparisons:

Grigorieva, Korol (4/08) (CHAL) CC72194

Faust, Melnikov (A/08*, 10/15) (HARM)

HMA195 1981, HMC90 2219

F Couperin • Forqueray

F Couperin Pièces de violes – Suite No 1; Suite No 2. Les goûts réunis – Concert No 10, 'Plainte pour les violes' **Forqueray** Pièce à trois violes. La girouette

Atsushi Sakaï, Marion Martineau, Isabelle

Saint-Yves *vas da gamba* Christophe Rousset *hpd*
Aparté ② AP166 (63' • DDD)



Immaculate and elegant: gambists Atsushi Sakai and Marion Martineau impress in Couperin with harpsichordist Christophe Rousset



Couperin's E minor Suite for bass viol and continuo is possibly the most beautiful

work for the instrument. We have many fine early recordings of the two Couperin Suites by Jordi Savall (1976), Wieland Kuijken (1992), Nima Ben David (2000), Mikko Perkola, Philippe Pierlot (both 2008) and, most recently, Paolo Pandolfo and Lorenz Duftschmid (2013). Now, Atsushi Sakai, who so impressed us with his Forqueray set (5/16), brings warmth and an immaculate, elegant, rhetorical and compelling vision to these works.

Sakai benefits from just the right support from Christophe Rousset and Marion Martineau (who apparently retunes her viol in the E minor Sarabande for one low G in bar 11!). They are joined by Isabelle Saint-Yves, delightfully blending their instruments in Couperin's nostalgic *Plainte* and a bewitchingly beautiful suite of pieces by Antoine Forqueray – three of which were found in a manuscript in Lille and the fourth, a whimsical *La girouette* ('Weathervane'), surviving as a solo in a Paris manuscript and arranged here for a trio. The Forqueray suite has also been recorded by Vittorio Ghielmi (Passacaille,

2014) and Justin Taylor, who transcribed it for solo harpsichord (Alpha, 11/16). The inclusion of the Forqueray pieces on this disc highlights the known professional connections between the Couperins and the Forquerays.

Sakai's faithfully rendered performances of the Couperin suites, especially when compared with those of the more independently minded, Forquerayian Pandolfo, suggest the warmer, more measured approach and sensibilities of Marin Marais. Couperin was equally well acquainted with Marais (his Versailles colleague and Paris neighbour) who died in 1728, the year in which Couperin issued the suites, and the 'Pompe funèbre' of the D minor Suite, sublimely interpreted here, is often mentioned as his tribute to Marais. A ravishing disc! **Julie Anne Sadie**

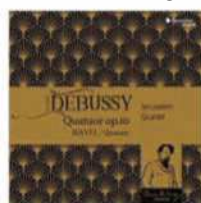
Debussy · Ravel

Debussy String Quartet, Op 10

Ravel String Quartet

Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2304 (54' • DDD)



'Don't forget that my String Quartet was already conceived as four-part

counterpoint, whereas Debussy's Quartet is purely harmonic in design', Ravel stated in an interview in 1931, carefully pinpointing the differences between two works which, rightly or wrongly, have come to be regarded as companion pieces. In the Jerusalem Quartet's new recording, issued as part of Harmonia Mundi's Debussy centenary series, they seem poles apart in style and mood. The aim of the series is 'to reread these scores, providing a new view of the works concerned', and the Jerusalem Quartet's Debussy is unquestionably challenging.

It's a strikingly intense performance, grand in scale, emotionally heated and dark in tone: Debussy's repeated instruction *avec passion* in the final movement could easily apply to the interpretation as a whole. It's by no means wild, and in many ways is exceptionally faithful to the score. The opening statement really is *très décidé*, as if ushering in the determined search for a new musical language that follows. *Un peu retenu*, later on, indicates a relaxation of momentum rather than a radical gear change, while *doucement expressif* is an entirely apt description of the slow movement.

Yet at the same time, the richness and weight of the Jerusalem Quartet's sound spreads a pall of sensuality over the whole work, and the sweep and urgency of the phrasing create a heady immediacy

throughout. We're very much in the world of *Pelléas* or *L'après-midi d'un faune*, and reminded more than once that Debussy had, as yet, not quite rid himself of Wagner's influence. Place it beside the Melos Quartet's performance, considered the benchmark by many, and the latter seems restrained, albeit more intimate, in comparison. Which you prefer is ultimately a matter of taste, but the new recording is utterly compelling.

Turning to the Ravel, the contrast comes almost as a jolt. Turbulent sensuality gives way to sensuous refinement as the dark string sound perceptibly brightens. Ravel's Classicism is very much to the fore, though we're also very aware of the troubling emotions that constantly threaten its surface. Where Debussy's Scherzo preens and swaggers, Ravel's is witty and playful until the yearning central section stops it in its tracks. There's a sparseness to the slow movement that suggests unease rather than the more usual nostalgia, and the *agitée* finale begins angrily before recovering its poise. It's a fine performance, beautifully articulated and superbly played, but ultimately it's the Debussy that is the disc's *raison d'être*. It's quite remarkable: do listen to it. **Tim Ashley**

Debussy – selected comparison:

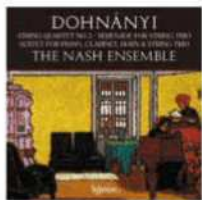
Melos Qt (11/79⁸) (DG) 479 0529GOR

Dohnányi

Serenade, Op 10. String Quartet No 3, Op 33. Sextet, Op 37

The Nash Ensemble

Hyperion © CDA68215 (76' • DDD)



The Nash Ensemble dig into Dohnányi's Serenade (1902) with gusto, relishing the music's myriad felicities. If they don't quite match the exhilarating élan of the 1941 RCA account with Heifetz, Primrose and Feuermann (RCA, 4/43) – no recording has, as of yet – their performance is rife with character and incident, and absolutely riveting in its own right. I love the theatrical way they sigh and sob at 2'00" in the fourth movement, for example. And in the rambunctious finale, especially, their playing conveys a frisson that's unusual for a studio recording.

The Nash's performance of the Third String Quartet (1926) is more impressive still. Right from the first surging phrase – which froths and spits like a crashing wave – they grasp the emotional meaning of the composer's *agitato e appassionato* directive. At times their playing feels

almost desperate in its intensity, yet they can be powerfully seductive, too, as in the sinuous, conspicuously Debussian second theme – and particularly its return at 7'33". The central *Adagio religioso* is as sleek as the opening *Allegro* is tumultuous – in my mind evoking glossy, candlelit marble – yet also contains passages that suggest acute internal turmoil. The brief finale is arguably less inspired than the preceding movements but the Nash make the best of it, balancing hearty jocularly and athletic grace.

I've listened often and with pleasure to the Ensemble Kheops's fascinatingly edgy, Modernist take on the 1935 Sextet (Fuga Libera, 1/12). The Nash, by contrast, seize upon the score's unabashed Straussian sensuality and the result is simply irresistible. Indeed, in their hands there's something distinctly – and quite magically – *Ariadne*-esque about the music's play of humour and seriousness, light and shade (not to mention the occasional suggestion of the harmonium in the writing for clarinet and lower strings). It's a gloriously overripe, at times rapturous interpretation, and I'm smitten by it.

If you've never taken to Dohnányi's music before, these performances should win you over. If you're already a convert, you'll want this. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Górecki

String Quartet No 3, '... songs are sung', Op 67

Dafô Quartet

Dux © DUX1302 (49' • DDD)



Górecki's Third String Quartet remains one of his most indecipherable works. It is a meditation on death (the Russian poet Velimir Khlebnikov's phrase 'When people die, they sing songs' provides the work with its *raison d'être*) and as such is completely consistent with the composer's output in general. The booklet notes, by Agnieszka Jeż, try to link this with the Third Symphony, and of course there is such a connection, but in simple terms of musical vocabulary the Quartet is in a different realm, not eschewing the later 'simple' style but returning too to the uncompromising quality of the earlier Górecki.

It is perhaps uncomfortable music given his popular public image, but Górecki was a very consistent composer and his early, dissonant style actually relates very clearly to his later, modal/tonal work, particularly in terms of gesture. His use of insistent repetition never changed and he always knew how to

use it to maximum effect, never stretching it too far. This is amply evident in the Third Quartet, in all five movements, but perhaps nowhere more than in the first, in the brooding final section, or the imploring melodic phrases of the second, which do indeed come close to the Third Symphony. I am reluctant to try to find a 'late style' in Górecki, as Edward Said might have done, because it has always seemed to me that his style, throughout his output, was all of a piece. There is a rigour, an uncompromising intensity that runs all the way from his early works such as *Genesis I* of 1962 to pieces from much later such as this quartet, independent of the musical vocabulary.

The Dafô Quartet have more than the measure of this music: this is a powerful, gripping performance, beautifully recorded. Any admirer of Górecki needs to have this disc. **Ivan Moody**

A Hamilton

'music for people'
music for people who like art^a. To The People^b.
music for roger casement^c

^bJuliet Fraser sop^a • Michelle O'Rourke voc

^bMaxime Echardour perc^a • Crash Ensemble /

Alan Pierson; Ives Ensemble

NMC © NMCD240 (77' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Muziekgebouw aan't IJ, Amsterdam, November 29, 2006



The Irish composer Andrew Hamilton (b1977) writes what one might describe as informal process music, whereby very short musical fragments are repeated, juxtaposed and recombined in a manner reminiscent of sampling (though everything is done live). Most are tonally derived but the manner of their treatment deliberately decontextualises them, accentuating the impression of sampling. In a certain sense the materials themselves hardly matter, in that the music seems to be 'about' the observable processes brought to bear on them; but in another sense they matter as much as in any other music. The degree and quality of referentiality introduces an element of humour, which can be subverted when fragments are repeated to the point of obsession. This is most striking towards the end of *music for people who like art*, when the vocalist's gasp (hitherto a single fragment) overwhelms the zany texture in a very disquieting way. Such moments make a piece, the following coda seeming almost superfluous except from a formal point of view – then again, one suspects that its very

irrelevance is intentional. *music for roger casement*, written for the Ives Ensemble, sounds more straightforwardly like a 'concert' ensemble piece, though in many ways it is a twin of *music for people who like art*, minus the voice (the other difference being in the instrumentation, which gives the impression of an extended accordion and is reminiscent of later Donatoni).

Between the two is *To The People*, a more extended duo for soprano Juliet Frasier and percussionist Maxime Echardour, in which similar strategies are played out more discursively. To my mind the ensemble pieces make the stronger impression, growing on one with each hearing.

The sound recording of *music for people who like art* has an audibly different quality from the others', suggestive of electronic treatment of some kind, with the voice embedded deep in the mix and emerging only gradually. But the discipline required to suggest mechanisation at this level of rhythmic difficulty forces admiration. If only all composers were so well served.

Fabrice Fitch

Handel

'Melodies in Mind'

Suite imaginaire. Seconde Suite imaginaire. Trio Sonatas, Op 2 - No 1, HWV386; No 4, HWV389. Keyboard Suite, HWV427

Ensemble Amarillis

Evidence Ⓢ EVCD049 (63' • DDD)



We have the Philharmonie de Paris's Musée de la Musique to thank

for this thoughtful programme from Ensemble Amarillis, because while the original concept was to stick entirely to Handel's trio sonatas – and Caromb-based recorder maker Bruno Reinhard had provided Héloïse Gaillard an alto copy after Handel's famous recorder-making contemporary, Thomas Stanesby Jnr – the museum then gave the harpsichordist Violaine Cochard the opportunity to play an original late 18th-century instrument by the British firm Longman and Broderip. So suddenly all change, and the finished musical dish sees two trios plus two 'Imaginary Suites' plucked from Handel's three collections of harpsichord suites; 'imaginary' because, while some movements have been left as solo harpsichord, others are performed as duos or trios with basso continuo. Plus, each suite's final movement – one a chaconne and one an aria with variations – has been

idiomatically arranged for trio with basso continuo by contemporary composer Erik Desimpelaere.

The first thing to hit your ears is how exceptionally bright and immediate the sound is. In fact some listeners may initially have preferred the sort of engineering which purposefully planes off some of the period instruments' rougher edges, particularly with Alice Piérot's violin (a copy by Marseille luthier Jérémy Chaud). For my part I like it very much; there's an unashamed authenticity about it all which I find very attractive, and I think that even lovers of dulcet tones will quickly acclimatise and enjoy.

The overall balance is very nicely done too: recorder hugged just behind the violin; Cochard's sparky harpsichord-playing equally shining out as one would expect; a subtler level from theorboist Florent Marie; and a healthy amount of Annabelle Luis's beautiful cello (a copy after a 1777 instrument by the prolific French luthier Nicolas Augustin Chappuy).

There's also real vitality and conviction across the disc, as you might expect from such a labour of love. Listen to the energy of the Trio Sonata HWV386's final *Allegro*, for instance, as the violin and recorder dance around each other. All in all, great stuff. **Charlotte Gardner**

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Mendelssohn

'Complete Works for Cello and Piano'

Cello Sonatas - No 1, Op 45; No 2, Op 58.

Assai tranquillo. Lied ohne Worte, Op 109.

Variations concertantes, Op 17

Marcy Rosen vc **Lydia Artymiw** pf

Bridge © BRIDGE9501 (70' • DDD)



The cellist Marcy Rosen was a founding member of the Mendelssohn String

Quartet and remained with the ensemble for more than three decades until its disbandment in 2009. The MSQ made relatively few recordings, alas, and most are currently out of print, but a lovely BIS CD of Mendelssohn's two string quintets (with Juilliard Quartet veteran Robert Mann) gives a taste of their open-hearted, unfussy approach. Rosen's new disc of the composer's cello sonatas displays similar interpretative attributes.

These are predominantly lyrical performances. Rosen has a full, warm tone, and phrases with an emphasis on songlike legato that links the two sonatas and *Variations concertantes* to the composer's many *Songs Without Words*. And, of course, in addition to the eight volumes of 'songs' he wrote for solo piano, there's one for cello, too. Rosen's reading of that miniature – Op 109 – is indicative of the entire programme. There's an appealing ease and forthrightness to Rosen's approach, but it seems rather too plain heard alongside the dramatically characterised accounts of Mischa Maisky and Sergio Tiempo (DG, A/02) or the quicksilver delicacy of Jan Vogler and Louis Lortie (Berlin Classics, 8/03).

I'm more impressed with Lydia Artymiw, whose rhythmic energy and pellucid tone provide an effective foil for the unrelieved mellowness of Rosen's playing. Listen, for instance, to how elegantly the pianist articulates the minuet-like rhythms in the second movement of the First Sonata. This is no surprise, really, as Artymiw also has a long association with this composer's music; her now nearly 40-year-old recording of the gorgeous Op 6 Sonata remains a favourite (Chandos, 9/83).

In sum, although these are unfailingly musical performances of Mendelssohn's works for cello and piano, other recordings offer more in terms of fine detail and dramatic punch. If you find Maisky too fussy and Vogler too sleek, try Daniel Müller-Schott and Jonathan Gilad (Orfeo), or splurge for two separate discs by Alice Neary and Benjamin Frith – members of

the Gould Trio – and you'll get marvellous versions of the two piano trios to boot (Champs Hill, 11/14, 1/17).

Andrew Farach-Colton

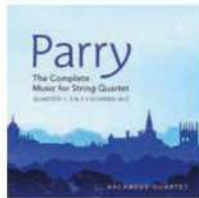
Parry

'The Complete Music for String Quartet'

Three String Quartets. Scherzo

Archaeus Quartet

MPR © 2 MPR102 (82' • DDD)



Parry made no secret of his musical lineage. 'Zweite Quartette C-dur', wrote the

20-year-old composer on the score of his Second Quartet (he was living in Gloucestershire at the time). 'One is reminded of the same rhythmic dynamism heard in Mendelssohn's Quartet in F minor, Op 80', writes Jeremy Dibble, in the booklet notes, of Parry's First Quartet of 1867. I wouldn't go quite that far. Rather, it's like one of those miniature steam locomotives that engineering apprentices produced in the 19th century: a polished, fully operational scale model of a Mendelssohn quartet, made with craft and considerable charm.

There are worse models for an aspiring composer; but one of the most satisfying aspects of this first recording of the complete Parry quartet cycle is hearing the young composer outgrowing his influences. The Second Quartet, written in 1868, is on a larger scale and sparkles with sunlight: Dibble believes it carries the imprint of Parry's burgeoning passion for his future wife Maude.

Leap forwards a decade to the Third (1878) and Parry's vision has expanded again. This is a substantial, assured and surprisingly troubled work that struggles to assert G major optimism against ever-lengthening shadows: there's more than a touch of Nibelheim in what Parry called its 'death's head scherzo'. This is the only work in this collection to have been recorded before; the Archaeus Quartet also include an undated, unpublished scherzo, completed by Dibble for this recording.

So there it is, and if you're a Parry aficionado or an explorer of rare 19th-century chamber music, you'll probably already have decided to add this to your collection. The Archaeus Quartet play each of these works with energy and conviction. They're not the glossiest-sounding of ensembles, and there are a couple of moments where their intonation slightly misses its mark. Parry's slow movements, in particular, might have

benefited from being allowed to blossom a little more freely. But the sound is transparent and natural, and these players certainly catch the music's drama: the flashes of vibrato-free harshness in the Third Quartet's scherzo are suitably chilling. In Parry's anniversary year, it fills a gap in the recorded repertoire very handsomely. **Richard Bratby**

Saint-Saëns

Piano Trios - No 1, Op 18; No 2, Op 92.

La Muse et le poète, Op 132

Gould Piano Trio

Champs Hill © CHRCD140 (80' • DDD)



'A conversation between two instruments instead of a debate between

two virtuosos' is how Saint-Saëns described *La Muse et le poète*, written for piano trio in 1909, then orchestrated as a concertante work for violin and cello, and now included in its original form on the Gould Trio's disc of the composer's chamber music. 'Two instruments', one notices, not three, since Saint-Saëns very much relegates the piano to the role of accompanist in contrast to the closely woven instrumentation of the piano trios proper.

Listening to it, you're left wondering if the second version was already on Saint-Saëns's mind when he began the first, as the piano part, with its tremolandos and grand but brief interjections, sounds more like a transcription of an orchestral original, rather than the other way round. The Goulds, as one might expect, do fine things with it. This really is a conversation piece, with cellist Alice Neary responding to Lucy Gould's lofty violin phrases with lyrical warmth and the occasional moment of truculence, while pianist Benjamin Frith gently but firmly mediates between the two. That it feels at times discursive is Saint-Saëns's responsibility, not theirs.

The two piano trios, much underrated, could also perhaps be described as conversation pieces, albeit between three even-handed participants. In his booklet note, Terry Blain writes perceptively on how Saint-Saëns's determination to keep private emotions out of his output is often undermined by the depth of feeling the best of it contains, and the Goulds' interpretations carefully probe the resulting ambiguities without losing sight of formal logic or musical argument for a second.

You can't help but notice the way the First Trio's bleak *Andante* casts a shadow over the Classical poise of the movements



Drama and refinement: the Gould Piano Trio make delightful conversation in Saint-Saëns

that surround it, or how the imposing, five-movement structure of the Second is at times threatened by rhythmic instability and harmonic or melodic uncertainty before its tensions are replaced – rather than resolved – by stark abstraction in the fugal finale. Drama and refinement combine in the playing, too, and nothing seems forced or overstated, with tone and mood immaculately judged. The recording itself is beautifully balanced: listening on headphones, I really felt as if I were sitting in a room with the Goulds themselves at a private performance for an audience of one. Very fine. **Tim Ashley**

Schubert

Octet, D803. Five Minuets with Six Trios

(arr Oscar Strasnoy), D89 – No 3; No 5

Lorenzo Coppola *cl* **Javier Zafrá** *bn* **Teunis van der Zwart** *hn* **Isabelle Faust**, **Anne Katharina Schreiber** *vns* **Danusha Waskiewicz** *va* **Kristin von der Goltz** *vc* **James Munro** *db*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2263 (70' • DDD)



As the cover billing suggests, Isabelle Faust is very much the guiding light in this period-instrument Octet. Yet her creative inventiveness is matched by her considerateness as a chamber colleague.

In a performance notable for its intimacy, Faust never seeks to hog the limelight even when an invitation beckons. A case in point comes towards the end of the first movement's exposition, where cello and clarinet toss about a fragment of the main theme against skittering violin semiquavers. This is one of several passages in the Octet that can threaten to turn into a mini-violin concerto. Taking advantage of the delicacy and quickness of response easier to achieve with a classical bow and gut strings, Faust creates a dancing filigree that decorates rather than dominates the cello-clarinet duet: a moment that typifies her collaborative spirit and the care for balance that marks the whole performance.

While alive to the Octet's Viennese hedonism, Faust and her colleagues are unusually responsive to its mysterious shadows, not least in the *Andante* and the Minuet, poised here between dance and dream. The period instruments, superlatively played (with minimal string vibrato), create naturally softer, more transparent textures than their modern counterparts. They make you uncommonly aware how much of Schubert's score is marked *pianissimo*: say, in the first movement's yearning second theme, sounded in turn by clarinet and horn, with characteristic touches of flexibility; in the rarefied duetting of the *Adagio*, its phrases floated over the bar line; in the clarinet's

diminuendo from *piano* to *pianissimo* in its solo near the start of the Scherzo, an effect glossed over in most performances; or in the magical horn solos near the close of the first movement and Minuet, sounding as if from the depths of the Romantic forest. Equally magical (a word that cropped up repeatedly in my listening notes) is the fourth movement's penultimate variation, where the once homely theme dissolves into a hushed – and here, otherworldly – reverie.

After the eerie shudders of the slow introduction (which here sounds genuinely disturbed rather than mock-theatrical Grand Guignol), the Octet's finale can often seem an anticlimax. Not here. Paying close attention to Schubert's *pp* markings, the players make it airy and buoyant rather than hearty. As ever, the lighter period double bass ensures that textures are never weighed down, while the bouts of violin and clarinet virtuosity emerge as effortlessly joyous rather than merely frenetic. Impossible, of course, to talk of an outright winner among dozens of versions of this much-loved work. My own favourites include the Vienna Octet, 1990 vintage (Decca, 2/93), the Nash Ensemble (Virgin/Erato, 4/89, 10/94) and the more leisurely Mullova Octet (Onyx, 2/06). But the new performance's transparency and intimacy, its fine balance of exuberance and poetic inwardness, make it an immediate front-runner. There is a delightful bonus,

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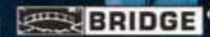
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too: arrangements of two early Schubert minuets that infuse Mozartian elegance with the demotic spirit of the Viennese beer garden, duly relished here.

Richard Wigmore

Schubert

Piano Trio No 2, D929. Notturmo, D897

Trio Vitruvi

Bridge Ⓢ BRIDGE9510 (59' • DDD)



This debut recording by the Trio Vitruvi leaves me frankly perplexed. On the one hand, I'm impressed by these young Danish players' patience. Tempos are relaxed yet somehow held taut – despite some occasional stodginess in the finale. On the other hand, they're rock steady to a fault. There's never the feeling they're pushing forwards in excitement or pulling back to savour a moment. I like the easy swing they give to the opening *Allegro*, yet with so little give and take it soon becomes monotonous.

The Vitruvi's ensemble and intonation are virtually faultless and their punctilious articulation is admirable. Every note speaks so clearly – even the cello's crazed demi-semiquaver triplets in the central climax of the *Andante* (at 4'38") – that if my ears were good enough, I'd probably be able to write the whole score out with this recording as my only guide. But, again, there's an evenness and regularity that becomes wearing. Their sound is beautiful, certainly, but chiselled and coolly marmoreal. Compare, say, the playful way Frank Braley and the Capuçon brothers shape the work's opening phrases with the Vitruvi's square sobriety.

There's one aspect of the score I wouldn't be able to notate from this performance, and that's the dynamic markings. Much of the Scherzo is meant to be played *piano* or *pianissimo*, for instance, yet the Vitruvi rarely venture below a hearty *mezzo-forte*. The matter is not always necessarily one of volume, really, but of emotion and atmosphere. The Vitruvi play the ravishing *Notturmo* prettily enough but their cool insistence on clarity and steadiness bring it perilously close to salon music. In Braley and the Capuçons' rapt account, it's pure magic.

The Vitruvi have a lot to offer, I'm sure of that. Hopefully their next recording will convey the flexibility and fire I've seen in YouTube videos of their live performances.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

R & G Capuçon, Braley (6/07) (VIRG/ERAT) 365476-2

Shostakovich

Piano Quintet, Op 57^a. String Quartet No 3, Op 73

^aPiotr Anderszewski *pf* ^bBelcea Quartet

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA360 (68' • DDD)



Shostakovich is something of a departure on disc for both the Belcea

Quartet and Piotr Anderszewski but a very welcome one. These two works have long been in their concert repertoire and it shows. They look at the Quintet with fresh eyes and that is evident from the outset. The pianist's opening soliloquy has power and a directness of emotion, which is matched by the Belcea, but it's at the point where the music moves into 3/8 (a minute and a half in) that this performance becomes a real ear-opener. How much wistfulness they find here, and Corina Belcea's tone as she reaches heavenwards is utterly heart-rending. The Takács with Hamelin tend to be more straightforwardly warm at this point.

The fugal second movement has a particularly engaging fragility, Corina Belcea laying the subject bare with the merest touch of vibrato, which is then matched unerringly by fellow violinist Axel Schacher. There's grim playfulness in abundance in the Scherzo, Anderszewski bright-toned but never aggressive-sounding, while the shocking torpor of the fourth movement is even more strikingly conveyed than in Argerich's wonderfully responsive performance with Capuçon et al. The Intermezzo was a particular highlight of the Hamelin/Takács performance but this new performance is on a similar level. Anderszewski and the Belcea perfectly capture the finale's unsettling mix of quasi-innocence and dark intensity, though if you want something altogether more sharp-tongued, more threatening, Argerich and friends are pretty much unbeatable.

The Third String Quartet is every bit as successful, setting off with an almost Prokofievian sense of the dance. The absolute certainty of ensemble is one of the joys of the Belcea, but just as important is their fearlessness, and their reactivity, capturing the music's emotional shifts unerringly. How deliciously insouciant, for example, are the last two notes of the first movement, a mood immediately shattered by the stridently insistent motif with which the viola launches the second movement; or the contrast between chordal writing and poignant recitative of the fourth. The Belcea are a shade slower than the Emerson, not only here but throughout the quartet, and it makes for a more interesting reading; in

the grimly violent third movement, for instance, the Belcea find more grit in the mix, while the Americans sound just a tad relentless. Shostakovich's finale maintains the intensity of the previous movements and the Belcea respond in kind. A tremendous addition to the Shostakovich discography.

Harriet Smith

Piano Quintet – selected comparisons:

Hamelin, Takács Qt (5/15) (HYPE) CDA67987

Argerich, R Capuçon, Margulis, Chen, Maisky

(11/07) (EMI/WARN) 504504-2

String Quartet No 3 – selected comparison:

Emerson Qt (6/00^a) (DG) 475 7407DC5

Weinberg

Piano Quintet, Op 18^a. Cello Sonata No 2, Op 63^b.

Sonatine

Jeanne Golan *pf* ^bAndrew Yee *vc* ^aAttacca Quartet

Steinway & Sons Ⓢ STNS30072 (77' • DDD)



Remarkably, recorded versions of Weinberg's Piano Quintet are now up around double

figures. Maybe not so remarkably, because this is one of his top-drawer pieces and a gift to ensembles looking to expand on the not so many concert-worthy 20th-century examples of its genre.

Jeanne Golan and the young members of the Attacca Quartet offer one of the most spacious accounts, at over 47 minutes, and I can see where they are aiming. Just because the composer himself and almost all others place the emphasis on drive and drama does not mean that there is no scope for taking more time to stop and admire the view. Introducing so much detailed phrasing and shaping into the rhetorical slow movement certainly gives evidence of much thought and preparation. Still, I cannot say it entirely works. The outer movements lack forward impulse and urgency, and the sense of direction in the two slithery scherzos is again too vague. Curiously for a recording made in New York's Steinway Hall, the piano itself sounds bulky in the bass and fluffy in the treble, while the close balance and dry acoustic add to the sense of congestion.

Just as curiously, the sound picture brightens up considerably for the *Sonatine*, in which Golan's silvery touch teases out the subcutaneous strands of klezmer in the first movement and finds an effectively capricious solution to the problem of the oddly truncated finale. The Cello Sonata moves persuasively from searching to trenchancy, earning a place of merit not far behind Chaushian and Sudbin or Weinberg and Alla Vassilieva (Rostropovich's first

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Dynamic new breed: Third Coast Percussion combine rhythmic animation and serene reflection

One are the days when percussion players would spend their time counting empty bars at the back of the orchestra. The percussion section now plays an integral part in any symphony orchestra's sonic armoury. Yet the most exciting work continues to take place away from the conductor's podium through percussion groups and ensembles. These highly flexible and adaptable mini-multi-orchestras form a natural tributary for today's many stylistic cross-currents. Western, non-Western, classical, folk, jazz, avant-garde or pop – such diverse influences converge and connect in these more flexible contexts, resulting in inventive cross-fertilisations and creative collaborations.

Chicago-based Third Coast Percussion epitomise this dynamic new breed. Following on from their award-winning disc of music by Steve Reich (Cedille, 6/16), **Paddle to the Sea** showcases the percussion quartet's talents as composers and performers. The central work is the group's evocative soundtrack to the Academy Award-nominated film *Paddle to the Sea*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada in 1966, itself based on

Holling C Holling's 1941 children's book of the same name.

The score, which makes use of a bewildering array of instruments ranging from marimbas, vibraphones and drum kit to glass bowls, tuned cowbells, pitched desk bells, ceramic tiles and sand blocks, could have easily resulted in a dense textural tangle laden with special effects. However, Third Coast Percussion's acutely sensitive approach to sound yields a work that glides effortlessly and subtly between animated rhythmic sections and moments of serene, tranquil reflection.

If *Paddle to the Sea*'s childlike connotations are unambiguously laid to rest in Third Coast Percussion's recording, one should not be misled either by the title of the McCormick Percussion Group's recent release of works for solo piano and percussion ensemble, **Kid Stuff**. There's some seriously good music on display here too. John Liberatore's four-movement suite *This Living Air* mixes minimalist-style repetitive patterns with more agitated chromatic passages. The piano sometimes provides an extension to the ensemble's sound while at other times it takes off on its own journey. Similar unsettling

dualities appear in Ciro Scotto's *Dark Paradise*, with the piano's relationship with the percussion ensemble shifting between one of uneasy alliance and more open conflict. In contrast, Seunghee Lee's *Pung-Kyung* and Hilary Tann's *Solstice* are atmospheric and evocative works. A box of musical tricks featuring poppers, blowers and other childlike sounds finds mischievous expression in Matt Barber's lively and engaging *Kid Stuff*. The McCormick Percussion Group and Eunmi Ko on piano are excellent throughout.

Works for harp and percussion are less common than those for piano and percussion – a deficit that the Avalokite Duo attempt to address on **The Spirit of Sound**. But whether it's down to the quality of the pieces themselves or to the performances, this is an oddly unbalanced collection. The overall impression is not helped by a sound quality that places resonant, high-range percussion sounds (such as glockenspiels and bells) too loudly in the mix. The harpist Patrizia Boniolo gamely ploughs her way through music that is often written with scant consideration of the instrument's unique timbral character or physical properties. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the percussionist Guido Facchin is more at ease in the two featured contemporary works. One of them, *Wu Shib*, is written by him. Subtitled 'Mantra Suite for Harp and Percussion', the performance is aided by Facchin's own rather desultory vocal interjections but too often relies on clichéd rising and falling pentatonic patterns or percussive effects simply for their own sake. That the best composition on the recording – a charming selection of arrangements of Federico Garcia Lorca's twelve *Canciones populares españolas* – was written by a figure better known for his poetry than his music perhaps tells its own story.

Also falling under the 'unusual instrumental combinations' category, one may find an altogether more successful exploration in Duo Blockstix's **Works for Percussion and Recorder**. Pieces written for marimba and recorder work best here, with the instruments' earthy, woody tones complementing each other. Achieving a correct dynamic balance between the two is trickier. Mark Oliveiro's *Auto Dafe Suite* manages to do so by carefully dividing the material between the two parts, drawing on rhythmic and melodic elements from Latin and East Asian traditions to create a colourful and engaging musical

dialogue. Listening to recorder player Alice Crossley and percussionist Joshua Hill's lively, engaging and utterly committed performances of new works by Australian composers, one is left wondering why more music isn't being written for this fascinating combination.

A duo of a very different kind is heard on **Schattenriss**. Featuring organist Zsigmond Szathmáry and percussionist Olaf Tzschoppe, the cover warns: 'Achtung! Extrem dynamische Aufnahme! – Caution! Extremely dynamic recording!' Overpowering and intimidating, this is certainly not for the faint-hearted. With a nod to avant-garde classics such as Ligeti's *Volumina*, Stockhausen's *Mikrophonie I* and Xenakis's *Synaphai*, the Greek composer Andreas Paparousos's 2-2 sets the tone but does not really prepare us for the onslaught of the senses that is to follow. Joh Christian Schulz's nerve-shredding *Organologics* is far more disturbing, although, unlike the other works contained on this recording, it does end in consonance.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the most compelling pieces on the disc is Olaf Tzschoppe's *Schattenriss*. Making full use of Heidelberg Jesuit Church's resonant acoustic and the impressive dynamic and timbral range of the Kuhn organ, dark and declamatory pronouncements are exchanged between the two instruments, eliciting increasingly animated and dramatic responses.

Those struggling to cope with *Schattenriss*'s hardcore avant-garde aesthetic may seek solace in the equally serious but more immediately accessible percussion works of **Jia Daqun** (b1955). Belonging to a generation of post-war Chinese composers such as Guo Wenjing, Jianping Tang and, most famously, Tan Dun, Daqun's music harnesses Eastern and Western elements to highly imaginative ends. The Chinese influence is felt most strongly in large-scale works such as Daqun's *Prologue of Drums* (1994), where indigenous percussion and wind instruments are combined to produce a dynamic, celebratory work full of colourful, ritualised gestures. A different voice is heard when Daqun focuses on more limited sets of sounds. For example, in *The Song Without Words* (1997), for solo percussion, vocalised inflections provide a metric and melodic basis for a 'recitative' for octobans (a set of eight small tom-toms), a floating, dreamlike 'aria' for gong and vibraphone, and a rhythmically propulsive final movement.

However, by far the most eclectic and accomplished performance belongs to the debut recording by the Scottish improvisational ensemble Trio H.L.K. Featuring Rich Harrold on piano, Ant Law on eight-string guitar and Richard Kass on drums (hence H.L.K.), and augmented here with excellent contributions by Evelyn Glennie and also saxophonist Steve Lahman, **Standard Time** takes the listener into new and interesting territories by using jazz standards as its starting point. 'Recomposition' comes closer to describing Trio H.L.K.'s working methods than the more prosaic 'arrangement'. For example, a kernel from Jerome Kern's 'The way you look tonight' evolves into extended chord transformations in *Twilt*, while a phrase from Miles Davis's 'ESP' forms a bewildering set of developing variations in *Extra Sensory Perception*, encompassing a wide topographical stylistic landscape that includes King Crimson, Gong, Steps Ahead and John Scofield. However, while H.L.K.'s intention to revisit and re-energise classic tunes lies at the heart of jazz in general, the ensemble's willingness to travel far and wide – beyond more obvious and generic accents (and also way beyond traditional concepts of the jazz trio) – marks them out as true innovators and makes 'Standard Time' a truly remarkable album. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs Paddle to the Sea
Third Coast Percussion
Cedille © CDR90000 175



Various Cpsrs Kid Stuff
McCormick Percussion Group
Ravello © RR7577



Various Cpsrs The Spirit of Sound
Avalokite Duo
Dynamic © CDS7804



Various Cpsrs Wks for Percussion & Recorder
Duo Blockstix
Move © MCD561



Various Cpsrs Schattenriss
Zsigmond Szathmáry, Olaf Tzschoppe
Alien Sound & Art © ASA10002



Jia Daqun Percussion Works
Stick Game & Gu Feng Enss
Naxos © 8 579028



Various Cpsrs Standard Time
Trio H.L.K.
Ubuntu Music © UBU0006

pupil and later his assistant at the Moscow Conservatory). **David Fanning**

Piano Quintet – selected comparison:

Weinberg, Borodin Qt (OLYM) OCD474;

(MELO) MELCD100 0979

Cello Sonata – selected comparisons:

Vassilieva, Weinberg (RUSS) RDCD11026;

(MELO) MELCD100 0259

Chausbian, Sudbin (BIS) BIS-CD1648

Metamorphoses

Françaix Trio Mozart Trio, 'Kegelstatt', K498

Schumann Märchenerzählungen, Op 132

Smit Trio

Metamorphoses (Jean Johnson *cl*

Roeland Jagers *va* Ilona Timchenko *pf*)

Music & Media Consulting © MMC122 (72) • DDD



'Metamorphoses': a curious name for an ensemble devoted to the rather limited

repertoire for clarinet, viola and piano, of which two of the most familiar landmarks are included on this disc. That's probably not why you'd buy it, though, but rather for the lyrical, moodily atmospheric Trio (1938) by the Dutch composer Leo Smit, who was murdered in Sobibor. This isn't quite its first outing on disc but it's sufficiently rare that a new recording as poised, as characterful and as expressive as this one is emphatically worth hearing.

The other must-have here is the Trio by Jean Françaix; and if you find Françaix's music as irresistible as I do, you'll be both amused and wholly unsurprised to learn that it dates from 1990, even though it unmistakably breathes the air of Les Six. In other words, it's an utter delight, and Johnson, Timchenko and Jagers get its anarchic, gleefully subversive wit off to perfection, gliding artlessly from Impressionist dissonance to elegant, lopsided waltzes and circus gallops.

And, it has to be said, there's an engaging guilelessness about the trio's Schumann and Mozart too; always inside the style but never at the expense of the players' own lively musical personalities. Johnson (on clarinet) has a winningly sweet tone and there's nothing backward about Jagers's viola sound either. Schumann would surely have relished the sense of newness (as well as blossoming lyricism) that they bring to his *Fairy Tales*, and the way they let the first movement of the *Kegelstatt* Trio play out like unwinding clockwork suggests three players on the same wavelength and thoroughly enjoying themselves. These performances are sincere, imaginative and fresh as paint. **Richard Bratby**

Giuseppe Sinopoli

Gavin Dixon pays tribute to the short-lived Italian conductor and polymath whose life and work were full of surprises and whose controversial interpretations often divided opinion

Seventeen years after his death, Giuseppe Sinopoli (1946–2001) remains an enigmatic and controversial figure. Everything about the conductor was distinctive, from his stage presence (bushy hair and beard; broad, expressive gestures) to his tempos (often slow but never predictable). He divided opinion, but even his critics recognised his powerful intellect and emotional engagement. He also had a keen ear for orchestral colour, and his performances offered luminous and vibrant textures as well as his deep insights. In his short career, Sinopoli amassed a large discography, and it is full of surprises.

Sinopoli took an unlikely route to the podium, starting out as a psychiatrist and then composer. The psychiatric training was undertaken at the insistence of his father, yet Sinopoli's interest was genuine, and his psychoanalytical insights would later prove valuable in his interpretation of late-Romantic opera. As a composer, he was in the orbit of the serialist movement in his native Venice, studying there and at Darmstadt. His most successful work was his opera, *Lou Salomé*, about the eponymous 19th-century psychoanalyst and associate of Nietzsche and Rilke. Sinopoli recorded two suites from the opera, but his recordings also include typically luminous and insightful accounts of works by fellow Italian modernists Maderna, Sylvano Bussotti and Giacomo Manzoni. In addition, he brought a rare elegance to the music of the Second Viennese School.

As a conductor, Sinopoli was initially a contemporary music specialist, but a Venice performance of *Aida* in 1978 launched his mainstream operatic career. Verdi and Puccini came to dominate his repertoire, both live and on record, but his operatic sensibilities were arguably better suited to Wagner and Richard Strauss. Strauss in particular (*Elektra* with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1995; *Ariadne auf Naxos* from Dresden in 2000) benefits from Sinopoli's opulent textures and keen engagement with the singers. In Wagner (*Parsifal* from Bayreuth in

1998; *Der fliegende Holländer* with the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 1991) his pacing affords solemnity, while heavy accents from the brass punctuate and drive the music.

That brass-heavy sound was a Sinopoli trademark, and it proved as controversial as his tempos. As an orchestral conductor, his first major appointment was in 1984 with the Philharmonia Orchestra. London critics were hostile, but the appointment lasted a decade and produced some memorable recordings. The Elgar symphonies are particularly distinctive, the First noble, the Second impassioned and intense. The set

concludes with completely over-the-top renditions of the *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches Nos 1 and 4 – genuine Sinopoli oddities. The Mahler cycle is just as bold, and the results just

as mixed. The slow tempos often risk grinding the music to a halt, as in the first movement of the Third Symphony. But the Seventh is a revelation, with Sinopoli presenting the work as a unique and beguiling musical world.

A dispute over contract terms thwarted Sinopoli's planned move to the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 1990, though his brief tenure did result in a fine recording of *Salome* as well as several guest appearances in the following years. Instead, he went to Dresden, where his musical temperament proved well suited to the Staatskapelle. The elegant orchestral textures that he sought were already in the lifeblood of the orchestra, as was

the music of Strauss, which came to dominate his work there. But the surprises continued. After Sinopoli's wayward Mahler, Bruckner might have seemed like dangerous territory, yet his Bruckner cycle from Dresden (left incomplete at his death) is often revelatory. The Fifth Symphony in particular benefits from Sinopoli's ability to project lucid orchestral lines, and without sacrificing any of the music's grandeur or majesty.

Sinopoli also made regular forays into the late-Classical and early-Romantic repertoire, particularly Schubert, Schumann and Mendelssohn – music that

That brass-heavy sound was a Sinopoli trademark, and it proved as controversial as his tempos

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1972 – Professor and composer

Appointed professor of contemporary and electronic music at the Benedetto Marcello Conservatoire in Venice, the city of his birth

• 1978 – *Aida* in Venice

He was brought to national attention as an opera conductor by this production, and rose to international prominence in just a few years

• 1981 – Conducts the premiere of his own opera

Lou Salomé was Sinopoli's most celebrated work, its subject drawing on his training in psychiatry. It had its world premiere in Munich, and its Italian premiere at La Fenice, Venice, in 2011

• 1984 – London appointment

Sinopoli's time with the Philharmonia Orchestra – till 1994 – was controversial, but established him as an orchestral conductor to match his reputation in the opera world

• 1992 – Dresden

The Staatskapelle Dresden was a perfect fit for Sinopoli, combining opera and orchestral work. Here he excelled in late-Romantic repertoire, particularly Richard Strauss



always benefits from his intelligent phrasing and focused articulation. This music produced some of his best work, both with the Philharmonia and in Dresden, although it highlighted his increasing marginalisation in a world now dominated by the slick tempos and light textures of period performance.

Sinopoli's career ended as it began, with *Aida*. On April 20, 2001, he collapsed on the podium during Act 3 of a performance at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, and died shortly afterwards. He was just 54. Given his rapid artistic

development, it is tempting to speculate what might have been. His contract at Dresden was set to continue until 2007. He

was also consolidating an increasingly successful relationship with the Bayreuth Festival, and was due to return for the *Ring* cycle. In fact, Sinopoli, the perpetual polymath, was considering a different course. At the time of his death, he had just completed a degree in archaeology and was planning a new career studying ancient Greek ceramics – the ever surprising conductor pulling out surprises right to the end. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Schumann
Symphonies
Nos 1-4
Staatskapelle
Dresden /
Sinopoli
DG (4/95)

Instrumental



David Fanning hears a debut album from the gifted Aimi Kobayashi:

'Kobayashi rivets through fine-drawn line and bushed dynamics as much as through vivid gesture and brute force' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



Richard Bratby on Emmanuel Pahud's solo flute cornucopia:

*'Pahud demonstrates the richness of the flute's solo repertoire: the absence of Debussy's *Syrinx* feels very pointed'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**

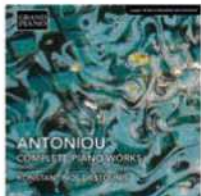
Antoniou

'Complete Piano Works'

Aquarelle. Entrata. Inventions and Fugue, Op 4 No 1. Inventions, Prelude and Fugue, Op 4 No 2. Piano Sonata, Op 7. Prelude and Toccata. Seven Rhythmic Dances. Syllables. Synaphes

Konstantinos Destounis *pf*

Grand Piano © GP779 (79' • DDD)



Despite his prolific creative output and long-held prominence as the founder and

conductor of important new music ensembles, Theodore Antoniou has not been well represented on disc. All the more reason to welcome Grand Piano's complete edition of his piano music. In preparation for these recordings, the young Greek pianist Konstantinos Destounis worked closely with the composer, who was present during the sessions.

In his booklet notes, Destounis succinctly states how Antoniou 'integrates Greek traditional elements within a wide range of post-war musical styles, always approached in an intuitive, personal way'. What is more, Antoniou's confident and exuberant piano-writing and protean inventive powers consistently hold interest.

The opening work, *Entrata* (1983), comprises Antoniou's largest single-movement piano work. It's a rhapsodic yet judiciously paced procession of massively resonating cluster chords, threnodies on the piano strings, free-floating single-line melodies supported by slow-moving bass ostinatos in fifths and rapid-fire virtuoso flourishes going up and down the keyboard. Many of these gestures return in a more concentrated and forceful guise throughout the shorter *Synaphes* (2001). By contrast, the 10 brief pieces encompassing *Aquarelle* (1958) might be considered to be freewheeling updates of Bartók's more advanced *Mikrokosmos*.

So might the 1959 Sonata's four brief movements, especially the *Adagio*'s intriguing dialogue between detached left-

hand octaves and sustained right-hand chords. The Op 4 pieces follow similar lines, yet are relatively dry in content.

However, the extended inside-the-piano techniques and wide dynamic palette characterising the six short *Syllables* (1965) wander into Luciano Berio territory while still going their own way, and unpredictable rhythmic detours keep you guessing in the Prelude and Toccata (1982). Antoniou's *Seven Rhythmic Dances* (2000) remain within traditional tonal bounds yet are full of delightful canonic asymmetry, and doesn't No 6's main theme sound like the Rondo from Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata on a bender?

Destounis's ardent, vivid and colourful pianism only enhances my positive response to Antoniou's music, together with the composer's justifiably enthusiastic endorsement. **Jed Distler**

JS Bach

Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830

Menno van Delft *clav*

Resonus © 2 RES10212 (134' • DDD)



Proverbially, the clavichord is held to be the most expressive of all keyboard

instruments because the player's contact with the sound source is least mitigated. No tracker, no retracting jack, no single-striking hammer, only the player's finger on a lever at the opposite end of which a metal tangent makes contact with the string. The clavichord's quiet sound also makes it the most intimate of keyboards. Expressivity and intimacy are the hallmarks of this new recording of Bach's Six Partitas by Menno van Delft, professor of harpsichord and clavichord at the Amsterdam Conservatory. He plays a 1784 clavichord by the Thuringian maker Christian Gotthelf Hoffmann, now owned by the Cobbe Collection Trust and which resides at Hatchlands Park, near Guildford in Surrey.

As special as it may be, this recording is not about the instrument but about Bach and the light that can be shed by his favourite keyboard on some of his best-known music. From the first measures of the B flat Partita's Prelude, an unexpected lyricism, a beautifully maintained singing line takes centre stage. I think it's fair to say that, generally speaking, the speed possible on the harpsichord or piano is unachievable with the clavichord's simpler mechanism. This means that some of the quicker dances may be slower than we've become accustomed to. To van Delft's great credit, the marginally slower tempo of a Courante or Gigue robs it of none of its character and spirit. We adjust our ears and are delighted by the aptly vivid expression, despite its smaller gestures.

But what of some of the grander, more extrovert movements of the Partitas, the haughty C minor Sinfonia, the cunning A minor Burlesca and Scherzo, the jaunty G major Passepied and Gigue or, indeed, the magnificent D major French Overture? Don't they sacrifice some of their essence in this quieter dynamic and more leisurely pace? Not a bit. The organist, the harpsichordist and the pianist (of whatever vintage instrument) each have their unique, non-transferable articulation strategies. So too the clavichord player. Listening to van Delft's masterful, always stylish interpretations is an education about what the hand can do, given different tools, in the service of the imagination. And because van Delft is a consummate musician, his Bach is immensely entertaining. **Patrick Rucker**

Beethoven

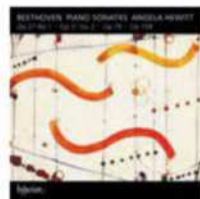
Piano Sonatas - No 13, Op 27 No 1;

No 17, 'Tempest', Op 31 No 2;

No 25, Op 79; No 30, Op 109

Angela Hewitt *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68199 (70' • DDD)



The latest instalment in Angela Hewitt's traversal of Beethoven's piano



Aptly vivid expression: Menno van Delft plays Bach Partitas on a 1784 clavichord at Hatchlands Park in Surrey

sonatas – Vol 7, though not packaged as such – focuses on three middle-period sonatas and concludes with Op 109. In her booklet notes, Hewitt offers insights into the aetiology of her interpretations.

One curious aspect of Hewitt's Beethoven is the pervasive absence of rhythmic tension. Change, be it of texture, tempo, harmony or affect, seems always prepared by a subtle, reflexive pulling back. This mitigates cumulative suspense, surprise at an unanticipated direction, even delight at a humorous juxtaposition, because we've been tipped off in advance. It also has the effect of homogenising the macrocosmic dimension of sonata structure. With the reduction of tension in quick movements, the slow movements' contrasting affect, whether intended to relax or ratchet up the expressive urgency, is rendered less vivid. In place of Beethoven's vibrant rhetoric, his often emphatic point of view, a sort of blandness becomes the status quo.

To cite random examples, the *Tempest* Sonata's first movement hinges on a back-and-forth between a scene-setting *largo* arpeggio, an affect which expands as the movement progresses, and the agitated tumult that gives the sonata its name. Near the end of the development (5'46"), Beethoven enlarges the *largo* affect to a full-blown recitative, marked 'simply and

with expression'. Here it is treated with such freedom that the underlying pulse is lost, and with it any sense of pathos.

In the loftier realms of Op 109, following a pedestrian *Vivace ma non troppo* and a *Prestissimo* verging on the nonchalant, the beautiful aria and its variations gradually become so sapped of energy that, by the sixth variation, forward motion seems a weary plod from beat to beat. Whether such procedures can intimate an ascent to supernal grace must remain moot.

Patrick Rucker

Brahms · Berg · Webern

'Brahms the Progressive'

Berg Piano Sonata, Op 1 **Brahms** Piano Pieces – Op 118; Op 119 **Webern** Kinderstück.

Klavierstück im Tempo eines Menuetts.

Variations, Op 27. Satz für Klavier

Pina Napolitano *pf*

Odradek © ODRCD330 (64' • DDD)



For her third Odradek CD release, Pina Napolitano presents an intriguing playlist.

She opens with Brahms's Op 118 Piano Pieces, then follows them with two posthumously published Webern works, the sparse little 12-note *Kinderstück* and the

early, slightly Brahmsian *Satz für Klavier*. That piece assiduously leads into Berg's Op 1 Sonata. The posthumous Webern *Klavierstück in Minuet Tempo* is cut from the same stylistic cloth as the Variations, Op 27, up ahead. Listen to how the Variations' final bars smoothly slip into those fragile descending arpeggios at the outset of Brahms's Op 119 group – what a magical transition! And Op 119 never fails as a concert ender, mainly due to the pomp and swagger of No 4's outer sections.

Napolitano fares strongest in the Webern and Berg works. She revels in the Variations' distinct dynamic plateaus and makes the composer's different accentuations clearly distinct. However, a faster tempo for the *Sehr schnell* movement would have better underlined the music's lilting humour in the manner of, say, Charles Rosen or Peter Serkin. The pianist shapes the Berg Sonata's introspective writing into expansive arcs, although stronger left-hand profiling from Hélène Grimaud (DG) and Dénes Varjón (ECM, 6/12) better drive the central climax's momentum forwards.

Perhaps it's the slightly dry engineering talking, but much of Napolitano's Brahms is loose-limbed, wan and, at times, technically uneven. For example, she frequently breaks Op 118 No 2's long lines as if running out of breath, losing

tonal focus at phrase ends. No 3's flattened-out main section and texturally uniform Trio pale next to Nelson Freire's vitality and clarity (Decca, A/17), while only No 4's soft passages generate palpable *agitato* tension. In Op 119 No 3 Napolitano has trouble maintaining the right hand's melody/lower voice and shifting left-hand accompaniment in perspective; whenever a left-hand crescendo kicks in, the right hand fades out of focus. By contrast, Emanuel Ax's interpretation (Sony) is a paradigm of control and grace. It must be said that Napolitano navigated similar challenges more successfully in her solo Schoenberg debut release, which is all the more reason why her Brahms should have been better.

Jer Distler

Brahms · Scriabin

'Norma Fisher at the BBC, Vol 1'

Brahms Variations on an Original Theme, Op 21 No 1^a. Variations on a Hungarian Song, Op 21 No 2^a **Scriabin** Piano Sonata No 1, Op 6^b. Études, Op 42^b - No 1; No 4; No 5; No 8

Norma Fisher *pf*

Sonetto Classics © SONCLA003 (64' • ADD)

Broadcast performances, ^aFebruary 14, 1972;

^aFebruary 2, 1979



It was during my studies at Kiev Conservatory that I first came across

Norma Fisher's name as an outstanding piano teacher. She was there as a jury member for the Horowitz competition and I expressed to her my obsession with the music of Scriabin. From the interpretation of his First Sonata and a selection of the Op 42 Études on this brilliant disc, I now see precisely why my own teacher recommended me to attend her masterclasses. London-born, of Russian-Polish parents, Fisher won second prize in the Busoni Competition in 1961, then shared the coveted Piano Prize in the 1963 Harriet Cohen International Music Awards with none other than Vladimir Ashkenazy, the year after his victory in Moscow. She appeared at the BBC Proms frequently throughout the 1960s and regularly recorded for BBC Radio, but never commercially. These recordings lie at the basis of the current disc, using mastertape (for Scriabin's Sonata), reel-to-reel from Fisher's personal collection (for the Études) and even a cassette recording of the 1979 broadcast (for Brahms), all masterfully and lovingly restored by the Sonetto producer and CEO Tomoyuki Sawado and engineer Andrew J Holdsworth. Although the piano

sound is clearly somewhat dated, the only seriously distracting reminder of these less-than-ideal origins is some background crackle in the Op 42 No 4 Étude.

Their status as historical documents apart, Norma Fisher's interpretations would grace anyone's collection. A self-confessed Brahms lover, she brings to the two sometimes overlooked sets of variations an intimacy and lyricism that radiate ease, warmth and humanity, void of calculation and over-intellectualism. The *Variations on a Hungarian Song*, themselves an intriguing mixture of caprice and full-bloodedness, are never harsh or dry, despite her sparing use of pedal.

The Scriabin recordings all date from 1972, when Fisher and others (including David Wilde, Janos Solyom and John Ogdon) were invited to contribute to the BBC's centenary celebrations. Fisher, who admits to never previously having played her designated pieces, brings out the intricacy, rapture and cosmic surges of the Études, and she does equal justice to architecture and dramaturgy in the Sonata. The Chopinesque *funèbre* of the finale is in itself something of a masterclass in long lines and spontaneous inflection (though Scriabinists should also note the stunningly Stygian 1977 account by Lazar Berman, only ever available on LP but findable in transfers on the web). This is Scriabin mourning the end of his pianistic career, as he was (wrongly) diagnosed with permanent damage to his right hand. In a cruelly ironic twist, it was trouble with her right hand that shortened Norma Fisher's own concert career, when in the 1990s she developed focal dystonia, a neurological condition, 'causing the muscles to seize up without warning', as she has put it.

Fortunately, having reinvented herself as one of the most sought-after piano teachers in the world, she is now able to enjoy what will surely be a widely acclaimed renaissance for her recorded legacy. Vol 2 is already planned for 2019. But the continuation of such series can depend on luck; Fisher's recording of Scriabin's Fifth Sonata, which was planned for release, unfortunately lacks the last few bars, and the producer has issued an appeal for anyone who might be in possession of a recording of the broadcast (info@sonettoclassics.com). **Michelle Assay**

Chopin · Liszt

Chopin Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35

Liszt *Années de pèlerinage - année 2: Italie - Tre Sonetti di Petrarca; Après une lecture du Dante. Liebestraum, S541 No 3*

Aimi Kobayashi *pf*

Warner Classics © 9029 57047-9 (65' • DDD)



The 'Funeral March' Sonata immediately makes it clear why Aimi Kobayashi

should have made it through to the final stage of the 2015 Chopin Competition. Her articulation is powerful and super-clear, in the way more or less *de rigueur* for artists who get that far. Not only that, but her rubato and profiling of dynamics capture something of the inner agitation that prompted Schumann's image of Chopin having yoked together his 'four maddest children'. On the downside, her dragging tempo of the slow movement may help to explain why she was not placed among the six prize-winners in Warsaw (the competition has since published the individual votes of all the jurors, which make for fascinating reading). Although her control and concentration are never in question, there is a touch of wilful self-regard that she will need to expunge somehow.

Kobayashi's finest qualities are on display in the three *Petrarch Sonnets* and the *Liebestraum*, all of which hold reverie and passion in judicious balance. And if she lays herself open to the accusation of playing more for effect than for substance, some might say this is exactly what Liszt invites her to do in the *Dante Sonata*. No lack of glamour and impact here, and no doubting that Kobayashi knows how to rivet the attention through fine-drawn line and hushed dynamics as much as through vivid gesture and brute force. It will be interesting to see how her musical personality matures through experience. She has certainly earned the right to be given that chance. The recorded sound fully registers her high-impact touch: to the point of an occasional glassy edge in the treble, some may think, but not so much as to constitute a serious distraction. **David Fanning**

Fauré

Complete Barcarolles

Michael Endres *pf*

Oehms © OC466 (62' • DDD)



Michael Endres's first recorded foray into Fauré (pun intended) stands out from the

pack in several respects. In contrast to the slightly dry, 'top of the keys' transparency typifying Fauré specialists of the French school such as Jean Doyen, Grant

Johannesen and Jean-Philippe Collard, Endres builds his sonority from the bottom up, singing out the Barcarolles' melodic lines with a warm, penetrating legato that is never weighty. Consequently, No 1's waltzing charm becomes more wistful and intimate than usual, while the pianist intelligently contours the chromatic intricacies in No 2's central climax. His subtle way of lingering on an unexpected cadence or uncovering an inner voice conveys a probing impression throughout No 3 that markedly differs from more straightforwardly lilting performances, such as the one in Delphine Bardin's Fauré Barcarolles cycle (Alpha, 9/10). Compared to the way in which Germaine Thyssens-Valentin unfolds No 4's descending imitative phrases in suggestive pastels (Testament, 8/02), Endres underlines them in primary colours.

While the Fifth Barcarolle's elusive harmonic game plan can easily withstand Endres's broad, nuanced interpretation, the cross-rhythmic phrasing somehow loses the very momentum generated in comparably straightforward performances by Robert Casadesu and Vlado Perlemuter. Likewise, his deliberate, tonally refulgent No 6 is antipodal to Thyssens-Valentin's expressive discretion, yet proves equally plausible. Furthermore, Endres's approach effectively illuminates No 8's volatile shifts in mood and dynamics. His apt inflections in No 12 transpire within the parameters of a steady, anchoring pulse. Is it my imagination, or does the left-hand ostinato foreshadow Stephen Sondheim's 'Send in the clowns'? In all, the mastery and individual imprint that distinguishes this splendidly engineered release is only to be expected of Michael Endres, whose large and wide-ranging discography may be one of the piano world's best kept secrets. **Jed Distler**

Haydn

Piano Sonatas – HobXVI:19;
HobXVI:46; HobXVI:52

Arthur Ancelle pf

Melodiya © MELCD100 2527 (69' • DDD)



Writing in these pages recently about Paul Lewis's latest Haydn adventure (Harmonia

Mundi, 5/18), Harriet Smith rightly reminds us that 'the genius of Haydn's sonatas is that they can take so many different artistic approaches'. The question, then, is whether there are any approaches the sonatas can't take. Arthur Ancelle certainly pushes his point further than

most. His booklet essay immediately sets his agenda: 'Haydn with an H for Hooligan'. Fair enough. Just as Shakespeare productions may seek to recreate the shock that audiences of his day would have felt at hearing the words that now have become part of our everyday language, so Ancelle sets himself the task of restoring Haydn's 'emotional manipulations' of his audience.

In deploying such exaggerated contrasts, he is open to the criticism of being more dazzling than illuminating. 'Haydn is fun', indeed. But there is a line between this and caricature, and Ancelle is dangerously close to it with his teasing hesitations, accelerations and florid variants in the opening movement of the A flat Sonata (No 46), all disconcertingly reminiscent of the way Glenn Gould used to treat repertoire he despised (such as pretty much all of Mozart). The outer movements of this sonata find Ancelle at his most quirky; for a safer, non-excessive approach stick with Hamelin. But suspicions that Ancelle is forcing his point disappear with his limpid and serene account of the *Adagio* central movement, and the remaining sonatas on the disc prove ideal vessels for his explorations. The other middle-period sonata, in D major (No 19), is convincing throughout, its Puckish finale surpassing even Bavouzet for joyful fizz. When it comes to the more often-played E flat Sonata (No 52), Ancelle responds fully to the rich textures, grand architecture and Beethovenian character without sacrificing the spirited and mercurial quality he emphasises throughout the programme. Helped by bright, airy recording quality, this issue shows Ancelle to be an intelligent and adventurous artist whose Haydn deserves to be heard by even those normally averse to interventionist approaches. **Michelle Assay**

Piano Sonata No 46 – selected comparison:

Hamelin (5/07) (HYPE) CDA67554

Piano Sonata No 19 – selected comparison:

Bavouzet (11/12) (CHAN) CHAN10736

Ogdon

'Original Piano Works'

Sonata 'Dedicated to my friend Stephen Bishop'.

Ballade. Kaleidoscope No 1 (Six Caprices).

Variations and Fugue

Tyler Hay pf

Piano Classics © PCL10132 (66' • DDD)



John Ogdon considered composing an unfocused pastime and hobby in relation

to his busy concert career but that didn't stop him from churning out nearly 200 works in many genres. Few were published or performed during his lifetime and the majority of scores remain in manuscript, although Ogdon did record several of his works commercially.

Not surprisingly, Ogdon's piano-writing is thoroughly idiomatic and physically logical for the average hand. But the music itself sometimes lacks point. Take the previously unrecorded Ballade, for example. It begins with slow, carefully considered chords that create a mood of rapt concentration. It suddenly breaks out into busy Sorabji-esque note-spinning, followed by slow chords interrupted by pointillist outbursts. Sparse counterpoint transpires leisurely and uneventfully, while the aforementioned note-spinning returns and recedes in time for a slow chordal finish.

The First Sonata's outer movements suggest the nervous energy and playful asymmetry of Michael Tippett's piano-writing but minus the older master's harmonic invention or contrapuntal discipline. Ogdon's large-scale aspirations seem best realised in the Variations and Fugue, because the work's very form enables – indeed, forces – Ogdon to focus and contextualise his myriad stylistic affinities (Busoni and Sorabji dominate) towards a cumulatively satisfying whole. Some listeners, however, may find Ogdon's quirks easier to digest in smaller doses in the form of his *Six Kaleidoscopes*. In the 'Barcarolle', Ogdon's avoidance of the pedal creates a tipsy rather than lulling effect, while the 'Scherzo brillante' might be described as a two-minute Prokofiev/Malcolm Arnold/Charles Ives mash-up.

The young pianist Tyler Hay has brilliantly mastered and assimilated these often elusive scores, even to the point where I heretically prefer his interpretations to Ogdon's. For example, the Sonata benefits from Hay's smoother and steadier control in the first-movement exposition and shapelier slow-movement trills. And while Ogdon's exciting but slapdash live 1979 archival recording of the Variations and Fugue remains a valuable document, Hay's studio traversal homes in on the daunting details without sacrificing the bigger picture. Furthermore, Hay's booklet notes prove him to be every inch as intelligent and insightful away from the keyboard.

Jed Distler

D Scarlatti

'Sonatas, Vol 1'

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk1Kk9; Kk19; Kk32; Kk39; Kk69; Kk197; Kk208; Kk234; Kk322; Kk380; Kk396; Kk430; Kk450; Kk492; Kk525

MARCY ROSEN VIOLONCELLO & LYDIA ARTYMIW PIANO

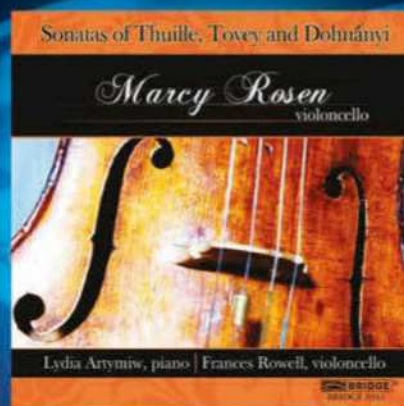


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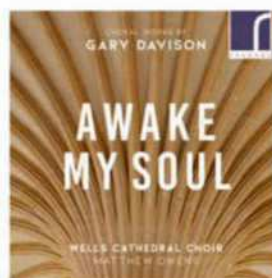
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Federico Colli *pf*

Chandos © CHAN10988 (67' • DDD)



Federico Colli made a splash when he won the 2012 Leeds International Piano

Competition, as much for his red cravat as for his Beethoven *Emperor*. Chandos has done well to sign him and this disc of Scarlatti says Vol 1, so presumably there is more to come – all 555? That he's a thoughtful and thought-provoking artist is made abundantly clear by his booklet essay, in which he explains his decision to group the sonatas according to mood (under such chapter headings as 'The Power of Illusion' and 'The Return to Order').

The playing itself ignites conflicting reactions. On the one hand, you can't but marvel at the sheer quality of his playing – his trills the epitome of crispness, his repeated notes sounding absurdly easy, while his command of dynamic extremes is second to none. It's impossible not to be impressed by his flair and he's clearly in accord with Yevgeny Sudbin's views on Scarlatti, that performing his music on the piano is akin to a transcription. Like Sudbin, Colli opts for a Steinway D and he's not afraid to add octave doublings and the like. He imbues Kk9 with a piquant brilliance but he also has a tendency to tug the rhythm out of shape; Sudbin (BIS, 4/16), no less mercurial, lends the sonata a rhythmic integrity that gives it greater naturalness.

The frustration is that some sonatas work wonderfully – Kk492, for instance, with which he opens chapter 2 ('Live happily!'), in which runs are stunningly controlled, moving from a whisper to a roar, and Colli brings out Scarlatti's Spanishries with élan. In Kk39 he gives Horowitz (Sony) a run for his money in terms of speed. If there's a generalisation to be made, it's perhaps that Colli is more convincing in the faster sonatas.

In the final chapter ('Enchantment and Prayer'), Colli takes a whimsical approach to Kk69, with much give and take in the dialogue. Anne Queffélec (Erato, 3/95) finds a simple honesty in her reading, while Sudbin, on his recent disc, imbues it with a spiritual otherworldliness. Colli follows this with Kk208, which becomes positively consumptive at a very drawn-out tempo (there's some superb footage of Maria João Pires playing this on YouTube). Kk32 concludes the disc, as it did Sudbin's. Ironically, though Colli takes a slightly

more flowing tempo, it is Sudbin who sounds more coherent, with Colli's shadings-off at the end of phrases done to excess. Yet, at his finest, Colli is formidable, with the most delectable quiet playing in Kk450 and a truly vivacious Kk396. **Harriet Smith**

Lika Bibileishvili

Bartók Piano Sonata, Sz80**Prokofiev** Piano Sonata No 6, Op 82**Ravel** Gaspard de la nuit **Sibelius**

Thirteen Piano Pieces, Op 76 – Nos 1-10 & 13

Lika Bibileishvili *pf*

Farao © B108099 (78' • DDD)



Here is a debut disc from a pianist whose biography does not feature any gold

medals or prizes from international competitions. How refreshing! With a programme that covers some of the most challenging peaks of the 20th-century repertoire, alongside most (why not all?) of Sibelius's Thirteen Pieces, Op 76, Georgian-born, Munich-based Lika Bibileishvili displays admirable versatility in both technique and temperament. There are no flashy gimmicks, and her emotional sincerity shines through not just the more transparent episodes of the programme but also the densest textures of Ravel's *Gaspard*, where she displays a full array of shimmering colours and touches in 'Ondine' and supreme technical facility in the horripilating 'Scarbo'. Prokofiev's first 'War' Sonata (No 6) is likewise articulate and firmly contoured, though without approaching the barbaric audacity of Richter. She could perhaps create more of a distinction between this sound world and that of the Bartók Sonata.

Rather than an unnecessarily truncated Sibelius, one might have hoped for a choice of filler that would have enabled Bibileishvili to show a more personal voice: something Georgian, perhaps? As it is, this remains an impressive calling card and one that should gain her many well-wishers.

Michelle Assay

Walter Rehberg

'Polydor Recordings 1925-1937'

Brahms Two Rhapsodies, Op 79. Sixteen Waltzes, Op 39 (excs) **Chopin** Polonaise-fantaisie, Op 61 **Grieg** To Spring, Op 43 No 6.

Wedding Day at Troldhaugen, Op 65 No 6 **Haydn** Piano Sonata, HobXVI:40 **Liszt** Ave Maria, 'Die Glocken von Rom', S182. Consolation, S172 No 3. Eglogue, S160 No 7. Funérailles, S173 No 7. Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este, S163 No 4.

Mephisto Waltz No 1, 'Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke', S514 (arr Busoni). Rapsodie espagnole, S254. Rigoletto: Paraphrase de concert, S434 (Verdi). Soirée de Vienne, S427 No 6. Sonetto 104 del Petrarca, S161 No 5. Valse de l'opéra 'Faust', S407 (Gounod) **Mendelssohn** Spring Song, Op 62 No 6 **Rachmaninov** Prelude, Op 3 No 2 **Rehberg** Two Dance Studies, Op 3. Five Fantasies on a Theme by Verdi, Op 2 **Schubert** Fantasy, 'Wanderer', D760.

Impromptus, D899 – No 3; No 4. Moment musical, D780 No 3. Piano Sonata No 18, D894 – Menuetto **Schumann** Fantasie, Op 17 **Sinding** Rustle of Spring, Op 32 No 3 **J Strauss II** The Beautiful Blue Danube (arr Schulz-Evler). Frühlingsstimmen (arr R Bass). Soirée de Vienne, Op 45 (arr A Grünfeld) **Weber** Invitation to the Dance, Op 65

Walter Rehberg *pf*

APR mono © ③ APR7309 (3h 57' • ADD)



Born into a musical family, the Swiss pianist Walter Rehberg (1900-57)

built up a busy career as pianist, teacher, editor, author and composer. He also made a good number of recordings, chiefly for the Polydor label between 1925 and 1937, followed by a brief association with Decca in the late 1940s. The majority of the Polydor items make up this first long-playing reissue entirely devoted to Rehberg.

Among Rehberg's recorded premieres include his tasteful, fleet-fingered Haydn G major Sonata, HobXVI:40, and an exciting though textually compromised Schubert *Wanderer Fantasy* via occasional added octaves and simplifications. Schumann's C major *Fantasie* embodies the grand manner but little interpretative depth, as does a hectic Chopin *Polonaise-fantaisie* where Rehberg seems pressured to shoehorn the music within the time limitations of two 12-inch 78rpm sides.

Rehberg's rhythmically resilient Scherzo from Schubert's D894 Sonata and A flat Impromptu from D899 contrast with the F minor *Moment musical*'s twitchy expressive underpinnings, while he plays the G flat Impromptu in Hans von Bülow's bowdlerised G major transposition.

Among Rehberg's numerous Liszt offerings, 'Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este' and a slightly cut *Rapsodie espagnole* hold their own next to Claudio Arrau's more characterfully poetic shellac versions. Jonathan Summers's informative and forthright annotations acknowledge the tense, wooden 'Eglogue', yet the Third *Consolation* and *Ave Maria* are beautifully

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Stefan Engels completes his survey of the organ works of Karg-Elert in Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim

Karg-Elert

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Stefan Engels org

Priory © PRCD1185 (79) • DDD

Played on the Steinmeyer Organ of Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim



Although it has taken 14 years, the mighty challenge for one player to record the complete organ works of Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877-1933) is now complete. Starting in 2003, Stefan Engels initiated his project for Priory with some of Karg-Elert's most adventurous music, including a magnificent account of the late Triptych, Op 141 (1930). The subsequent 14 volumes have maintained the highest level of musicianship, each generously filled disc featuring a different organ, each of which is either historically appropriate or

endowed with the extreme tonal resources that Karg-Elert's extraordinary scores demand. Criss-crossing the northern hemisphere, Engels played instruments as far afield as Altoona in Pennsylvania, Toledo in Ohio, Trondheim, Ulm, Hamburg, Zurich and, in the UK, the marvellous 1869 Edmund Schulze organ in St Bartholomew's, Armley, Leeds.

Even now, some 85 years after his premature death, Karg-Elert is probably best known for just one organ work, the 'Marche triomphale' (*Chorale Improvisation* No 59) on *Nun danket alle Gott*, which most organists will have encountered among the familiar pale blue 'Collection Simon' volumes selected by Laurence Swinyard. However, this piece displays but one facet of a cosmopolitan composer whose mercurial personality produced music that could swing in a moment from the epic to the eerie, the magisterial to the quixotic and the plaintively innocent to the bizarrely grotesque.

The youngest of 12 children, Siegfried Karg (as he was born) came to revere JS Bach, was encouraged by Grieg and in thrall to Debussy, and became a natural heir to Wagner, Strauss and the late Romantics. In 1916 he succeeded Reger as professor of composition at the Leipzig Conservatory. His great fecundity resulted in 158 works with opus numbers and 90 without, including important additions to the sonata repertoires for flute, clarinet and saxophone, helped,

no doubt, by his experience as a German Army bandsman during the First World War. He was also a prolific song-writer, leaving over 125 settings, and spent many years working on an important harmonic treatise, the *Precepts on the Polarity of Sound and Tonality*.

Karg-Elert's own preferred keyboard instrument was the Kunstharmenium (he was an indifferent organist) and several of the organ cycles recorded here are arrangements of earlier harmonium pieces. I particularly enjoyed Engels's imaginative quasi-harmenium registrations, with liberal use of the Vox Humana stop and shimmering 'stair-rod' string ranks. In *The Legend of the Mountain* (Vol 14, on the Link/Gaiuda organ in Ulm's Pauluskirche), he draws the most extraordinarily vivid colours, using tremulants and a rare Cymbalum stop. At the other extreme, the hefty registrations drawn on the Furtwängler & Hammer Organ of Verden Cathedral in Saxony (Vol 5) overwhelm the wind supply in the *Prologus tragicus*, Op 86 No 1.

Other highlights of the series include the compellingly radiant ending of the *Music for Organ*, Op 145, and I have never heard the *Passacaglia and Fugue on BACH*, Op 150, sparkle with such intensity (both on Vol 13). Nor would I be without the final piece of the 66 *Chorale Improvisations*, Op 65, an exhilarating treatment of 'Wunderbarer König' complete with brass and timpani (Vol 11).

The final volume ties up some loose ends, with transcriptions of music by JS Bach, Halfdan Kjerulf, Mendelssohn and Schumann and – bringing the project full circle – the late, effervescent *Kaleidoscope*, Op 144. There are important omissions, specifically the Symphonic Canzona No 3 and the Symphonic Chorale No 3 on *Nun ruhen alle Wälder* (with their violin and soprano parts). The later volumes' booklets also suffer occasionally from idiosyncratic translations.

These small niggles apart, this is a magnificent achievement, which is unlikely to be repeated soon, and enhanced by Neil Collier's consistently superb engineering. In addition to programme notes, full details of the organs are provided. It also makes a fitting tribute to the late Anthony Caldicott, whose tireless promotion of Karg-Elert's music inspired this undertaking. As my colleague Christopher Nickol stated in his *Gramophone* review of Vol 2: 'Stefan Engels is fully equal to the task; he's so in tune with Karg-Elert's varied musical personality it's as if he was born to play this composer.' Hear hear! **G**

shaped. However, it takes some effort listening through the cramped acoustic-era sound to appreciate Rehberg's blazing central octaves in 'Funerailles' and sweeping command of the Busoni edition of *Mephisto Waltz* No 1. But in Roderich Bass's rare transcription of Strauss's *Voices of Spring* Rehberg's fingers take supple wing. The pianist's brief, compact *Tanzstudien* and less interesting Verdi variations use the Jankó piano, an instrument featuring an unorthodox four-row keyboard that enables the player to grasp widely spaced chords and intervals with minimum stretching between keys. Consequently Rehberg's lush harmonies sound as if an extra pair of hands have joined in.

Kudos to Ward Marston for obtaining consistently clean and noise-free results from rare and sonically variable source material, and to APR for rescuing Walter Rehberg's fascinating albeit uneven artistry from obscurity. **Jed Distler**

'Solo'

Berio Sequenza I **Ferroud** Three Oriental Pieces **Helps** Second Thoughts **Honegger** Danse de la chèvre **Karg-Elert** Sonata appassionata, Op 140 **Marais** Les folies d'Espagne **Nielsen** The Children are Playing **Pärt** Estländler **Pintscher** Beyond (a system of passing) **Takemitsu** Air. **Voice** **Telemann** Twelve Fantasias, TWV40:2-13 **Varèse** Density 21.5 **Widmann** Petite suite **Emmanuel Pahud** fl

Warner Classics ® ② 9029 57017-5 (147' • DDD)



Assuming you're after a complete set of Telemann's

Twelve Fantasias for unaccompanied flute, is there any living flautist you'd rather have them from than Emmanuel Pahud? But would you want them as part of an epic two-disc anthology of unaccompanied flute music, alternating with works that range chronologically from Marin Marais's *Les folies d'Espagne* (1701) to Jörg Widmann's *Petite suite* (2016)?

That's what Pahud presents here, and it's formidable. If he wanted to demonstrate the richness of his instrument's solo repertoire, he's succeeded: the absence of Debussy's *Syrinx* feels very pointed. And, of course, he handles every piece idiomatically, expressively and with a tonal palette that ranges from a breathy bottom-register whisper to piercing flashes of stratospheric light. Works by Berio and Widmann, plus Matthias Pintscher's neo-spectralist

Beyond, sound at times as if they require a different extended technique almost by the note.

But Pahud is just as completely inside the milder repertoire: whether the delicately layered shades that he finds in Takemitsu's lovely *Air* (the opening item in the programme – nicely balanced nearly two and a half hours later as a sort of envoi by Varèse's *Density* 21.5), or the sweet, clear sound which he brings to Pierre-Octave Ferroud's *Trois Pièces* (there's a discreet but delicious swing of the hips to the central piece, 'Jade'). Telemann weaves through it all like a thread, and that's where my reservations lie. Sometimes the pairings are wonderfully effective: as when Arvo Pärt's artless mock-baroque *Estländler* emerges from the final patterns of Fantasia No 11. But you might well jump when the sudden, guttural opening shout of Takemitsu's *Voice* follows straight after Fantasia No 3.

I'm not entirely sure Telemann is best served by being presented like this. You lose any possibility of an overarching narrative, and Pahud's approach is almost too characterful: fluid and responsive to individual phrases, his rubato can disrupt the sense of song and dance that defines Telemann's ideas, even while it blurs the stylistic boundaries between the Fantasias and the rest of the programme. That might be intentional, of course, and it's a relatively minor reservation. For the quality of the playing and the sheer scope of musical imagination on display here, every flute aficionado is going to want this collection on their shelf. **Richard Bratby**

'Stephen Hough's Dream Album'

Albéniz España, Op 165 – No 5, Capricho Catalan^a **Chaminade** Pas des écharpes, Op 37 **Coates** By the Sleepy Lagoon **Dohnányi** Rhapsody, Op 11 No 3 **Dvořák** Humoresque, Op 101 B187 No 7. Songs my mother taught me, Op 55 B104 No 4^a **Elgar** Salut d'amour, Op 12 **Hough** Iver-song (Lullaby). Lullaby. Matilda's Rhumba. Niccolo's Waltz. Osmanthus Reverie. Osmanthus Romp. Radetzky Waltz **J Sserlis** Memories of Childhood, Op 11 – In the Steppes **Liszt** Étude, S136 No 10. Harmonies du soir, S139 No 11 **Love** The Third Man – Das alte Lied^a **Minkus** Don Quixote^a – Dulcinea's Variation; Kitri's Variation **Mompou** Scènes d'enfants – No 5, Jeunes filles au jardin **Ponce** Intermezzo No 1 **Seymer** Sológa (Sun-eye), Op 11 No 3 **Sibelius** Five Pieces, Op 75 – The Spruce **Solovyov-Sedoy** Moscow Nights^a **Tate** Somewhere a voice is calling^a **Traditional** Blow the wind southerly^a (^aarr/transcr Hough) **Stephen Hough** pf

Hyperion ® CDA68176 (80' • DDD)



A bran tub of bonbons, yes, but much more than that: it is also a portrait of an artist in

love with music of all sorts (including, with no apology, the unfashionable and the second-rate if it happens to appeal to him), of a master transcriber and of that rare animal, a concert pianist who is not afraid to mix high jinks with high art.

The first two items set the tone for the whole album: Hough's own take on the *Radetzky March* transformed into a waltz in the style of Grünfeld with plenty of mischievous Godowskian figurations along the way – virtuoso, musically knowing and pianistically sophisticated. Then *Das alte Lied*, second of the 15 Hough transcriptions and original compositions featured on the album. It's a nostalgic song that many will know from the recording by Richard Tauber accompanying himself on the piano (it's known as the 'Whispering Record'). Tauber was one of those magicians with the power to transform base metal into gold. Hough is another. I found this among the most moving pieces of the 27, along with Sibelius's 'The Spruce', Chaminade's *Scarf Dance*, 'Somewhere a voice is calling' and 'Blow the wind southerly' (the last two both simple Hough transcriptions). In all these we are eavesdropping, listening from next door to the pianist's private reverie. Hough's masterly use of the pedal and exquisite phrasing are very special accomplishments.

Everyone will have their own favourites; but elsewhere and by contrast are powerful readings of Liszt and Dohnányi, 'Waltzing Matilda' as a rhumba with lashings of Villa-Lobos, two transcriptions of dances from *Don Quixote* (the ballet) which teeter amusingly on the kitsch and, to end, Mompou's 'Jeunes filles au jardin', one of the earliest pieces Hough ever played, his companion as an encore for 40 years, which he first heard as a child on a mixed album 'much like this one' (writes Hough), played by Clive Lythgoe.

My only cavil is that the empty concert-hall acoustic at Wyastone leads the upper treble at *forte* and above to fly away, sounding disembodied from the lower register. Obviously, Hough and his longtime producer Andrew Keener like the effect. It is a small matter, one of personal preference perhaps. No matter. Witty, wistful, extrovert, introspective and cheeky by turn, this is a masterclass in a certain style of piano-playing, and a dream of an album. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Jörg Widmann

The German composer's sound world is very much his own, yet still manages to hark back to Beethoven, finds **Peter Quantrill**

Con brio. That's Jörg Widmann and his music in a nutshell. It's also the title of his best-known orchestral piece, commissioned by the Bavarian RSO and Mariss Jansons to offset their 2008 performances (and later recording) of Beethoven's Symphonies Nos 7 and 8. Take the opening A major explosion of the Seventh. Add a sprinkling of chords from the introduction, a dash of the *Vivace's* unstoppable ostinato and a generous seasoning of drum taps, tuned and untuned. Stir vigorously. And, as *Grove Music Online* would have it (in its 'brio' entry), with 'brilliance and dash'.

It's a winning recipe for a concert overture. No wonder that Jansons – hardly known as a champion of new music – took on *Con brio* (2008) with such relish. During only the first six months of 2018 it has received performances in concert halls from Mexico City to Novosibirsk, conducted by the likes of Sir Roger Norrington and by Widmann himself, and later this year it will be played in Frankfurt under Andrés Orozco-Estrada.

What's his secret? For one thing, the spreading hinterland of one who *makes* music as much as he makes it up. Born in 1973, Widmann pursued parallel studies in clarinet and composition in his home city of Munich. He took classes in his instrument with Charles Neidich at the Juilliard School before returning to Germany and becoming a composition pupil of Henze and Wolfgang Rihm, among others. So it is that Widmann's own music works as an outgrowth of the post-war German musical landscape peopled by Henze, Rihm and Helmut Lachenmann, in which modernism has over time vacuumed up those idioms which it was invented to reject and displace.

The entire heritage of Austro-German music echoes through Widmann's output

Happy the composer who can play his own music, alongside that of Mozart and Schumann: he will never be short of performances. Widmann has written for the clarinet from early on, and the *Fünf Bruchstücke* ('fragments') of 1997 stand out as provocative examples of a musician flexing his muscles, stretching the limits of his technique as both a clarinetist and a composer, all the more telling for their brevity.

Just under a decade later there followed an *Elegie* (2006) for clarinet and orchestra. From the soloist's doleful descending line onwards it's unmistakably informed – both on paper and on his own ECM recording – by the layered memories of countless Mozart concerto performances. The orchestration is fastidiously achieved, and this too bears the mark of experience, for Widmann's fellow performers have not been shy in commissioning him. Unprompted, within an interval conversation, Christian Tetzlaff set the concerto written for



him by Widmann in 2007 alongside Ligeti's as the two finest violin concertos of our time. In the composer's own words, 'a tremendous pouring forth, a manic circling of specific intervals and chords' is what you hear almost uninterrupted for the work's half-hour span in a *cantabile* accommodation with the history of the genre, and especially its apotheosis in Berg.

From *Dunkle Saiten* ('Dark Strings', for cello, 1999-2000) onwards, Widmann has found a natural home in the concerto genre. 'Virtuosity is a natural part of my musical self-conception,' he has remarked, 'something I fall into almost like a maelstrom. For me, virtuosity is: astonishment! I want to be amazed at hearing, playing and composing music! Like a child.' While this attitude is neither especially exceptional or extraordinary among composers, it is both nurtured in Widmann's case by fluency and tempered by a practical understanding of how far he can push his soloists.

The entire heritage of Austro-German music echoes through Widmann's output, but it's an inheritance worn lightly. The *Badinerie* from Bach's Orchestral Suite No 2 felt like a natural, inevitable encore when the Cleveland Orchestra brought *Flûte en suite* (2011) to the BBC Proms in 2014; Widmann's piece was revived last year by the Vienna Philharmonic and Christian Thielemann. Schumann rather than Wagner is woven into *Trauermarsch* (2014), a piano concerto premiered in 2014 by the Berlin Philharmonic and Sir Simon Rattle, who make their farewell tour this summer with a new commission (see facts box). The soloist whom Widmann had in mind for the piano concerto was Yefim Bronfman, known for his strength of articulation in



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCO BORGREVE

WIDMANN FACTS

Born Munich, June 19, 1973**Publisher** Schott

New works Orchestral version of *Das heisse Herz* (2018), a Lieder cycle setting Heine, Brentano, Härtling and songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*; *Tanz auf dem Vulkan* (2018), to be toured by the Berlin Philharmonic and Sir Simon Rattle; Violin Concerto No 2, written for his sister, Carolin

Schumann and Brahms. 'I think somebody like Franz Liszt would have liked the idea of a piano concerto as a funeral march,' Widmann has said. 'If there is any other kind of music that would come to my mind and is close to the sound world of my piano concerto it would be two composers who did not write a piano concerto themselves: Gustav Mahler and Alban Berg – yet I hope it is utterly my very own sound world. It is the archaic funeral-march rhythm itself that fascinated me.'

Islands of remembrance and reconciliation in Widmann's music can often

be traced back to Schubert. His Octet (2004) takes both its scoring and its expressive key signature of nostalgia from Schubert's example, but the half-hour, textless *Lied* (2003, rev 2009) is a more subtle and richly worked example of Widmann's preoccupation with making orchestras sing. This became the first of an instrumental trilogy, followed by *Chor* (2004) and *Messe* (2005), in which untuned sounds often take on the expressive meaning and continuity which is at the same time peeled away from the flesh of orchestral tissue. The accordion is one of Widmann's favourite sounds, and the whole orchestra breathes in *Armonica* (2006), where glass harmonica, accordion, harp, celesta, piano and melodic percussion instruments make an iridescent play of colour. Schubertian pianists including Leif Ove Andsnes have eagerly taken up the solo work *Idyll and Abyss* (2009).

A post-Romantic idiom and open embrace of pastiche have ripened as Widmann's output has expanded to include the opera *Babylon* (2011-12), which sought to 'rehabilitate' the biblical Egyptian city with a celebration of its cosmopolitanism and a seven-scene structure piled up like a ziggurat, each scene successively smaller than the last. The major commission to open Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie in January 2017 was *Arche* (2016), an evening-length oratorio quoting texts from Michelangelo and Schiller ('Ode to Joy') and incorporating a rap for children's choir. When the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra wanted a new piece to celebrate its 275th anniversary, Widmann produced *Partita* (2017-18), weaving in an orchestrated movement from a Mendelssohn clarinet sonata and a fun-for-all-the-family Divertimento.

It's still the chamber music where Widmann's own voice can be heard at its most personal. UK coverage of his output has been boosted in recent months by the Heath Quartet giving performances of the five numbered quartets (1997-2005). 'They're very exciting and often extreme pieces,' according to the ensemble's cellist, Chris Murray. 'They're entering the repertoire as mainstream pieces. And they link to each other, so that they can be done as a kind of super quartet in one evening.' The Fifth (2005) is called *Versuch über die Fuge* – a search for, or perhaps an attempt at, fugue. But whose? Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Stravinsky are all plausible candidates besides Widmann himself.

The Second and Third Quartets present a microcosm of his Schumannesque oscillation between introspective contemplation and feverish impetuosity. The semantic rubble of the chorale tradition lies scattered across the *Choralquartett* (No 2; 2003, rev 2006). The *Jagdquartett* (No 3; 2003) is the scherzo of the cycle, and another piece of Widmann's instrumental theatre at its most savage in the tradition of Apollinaire and Artaud. Setting out with a quotation from Schumann's *Papillons*, the four musicians are hunters, throwing their bows in the air and calling for blood. The ostinato from the opening movement of Beethoven's Seventh underscores their romp (con brio!) before it's mangled beyond recognition and hunters become hunted. In Widmann's words, there occurs a deadly change of perspective: 'The hunted in their emergency situation blame one of the four and say, "That's it!" That's a well-known social pattern; in this case it is the cellist who is accused. He is then mortally wounded and lets out one more existential scream and a Bartók pizzicato – until he finally dies in a repressed yowling glissando. Of course, the listener also knows that it was just a scherzo.' Of course. **G**

WIDMANN RECORDINGS TO SAVOUR

Large- and small-scale, and ranging across his career

**String Quartets. String Sextet**Minguet Quartet; Claron McFadden *sop*Alexander Hülshoff, Andrei Simion *vcs*

Wergo

These are authoritative, composer-approved recordings, capped by Claron McFadden as an imperious sibyl declaiming the 'Vanitas' text of the Fifth Quartet with soprano (2005). In a catchy, folksier vein, the string sextet *180 Beats per Minute* (1993) makes an exhilarating send-off.

**Viola Concerto. 24 Duos. Jagdquartett**Marc Bouchkov *vn* Antoine Tamestit *va* Bruno Philippe *vc*

Signum Quartet; Bavarian RSO / Daniel Harding

Harmonia Mundi (6/18)

The Viola Concerto (2015) was long sought from the composer by Tamestit, who is required to move through the orchestra to duet and duel with different members. Written for Renaud and Gautier Capuçon, the *24 Duos* (2008) condense the alphabet of Widmann's vocabulary into minute-long epigrams and postcards.

**Messe. Fünf Bruchstücke. Elegie**Jörg Widmann *cl* Heinz Holliger *pf*

German Radio Philharmonic / Christoph Poppen

ECM

Widmann's teacher Wolfgang Rihm casts a long shadow in this instrumental Mass, which drowns pathos in dissonance and concludes with a brutally monolithic 'Et resurrexit'.

Vocal



Hugo Shirley listens to Ian Bostridge singing Schubert from Wigmore Hall:

'Bostridge's tenor is aquiver with suspense, with consonants vivid and vowels wrung out for all their expressive potential' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



Alexandra Coghlan on a liturgical programme from Clare College:

'The choir's full-throated directness and declamatory warmth works beautifully for the Russian music' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**

JS Bach

'Dialogkantaten'

Cantatas - No 32, *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen*;

No 49, *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*;

No 57, *Selig ist der Mann*

Sophie Karthäuser *sop* **Michael Volle** *bass*

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin /

Raphael Alpermann *org*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2368 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Death-longing and the almost erotic union of Christ and the soul-as-bride are the keynotes

of these 'Dialogue Cantatas', each of them in effect a spiritual chamber opera. Best known of the three is the Christmas cantata *Selig ist der Mann* (No 57), where St Stephen's martyrdom symbolises the blissful release-in-death that awaits the faithful. But the others are hardly less rich musically: the Epiphany cantata *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen* (No 32), with its piercingly beautiful opening aria for soprano with oboe obbligato and its euphoric final duet; and the cantata for the Trinity season, *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen* (No 49), whose highlights are an overtly erotic 'wedding' aria for soprano with violoncello piccolo and a final chorale duet which sets the two singers against a cavorting organ obbligato.

Playing words as well as tones, with a keen understanding of Bachian rhetoric, the superb Berlin instrumentalists are consistently illuminating. Raphael Alpermann directs with a light, sympathetic touch, and his organ obbligatos in No 49 (including the bouncy *Sinfonia* which Bach plundered for his E major Harpsichord Concerto, BWV1053) are models of style and rhythmic élan. The Belgian soprano Sophie Karthäuser, too, gives consistent pleasure with her fresh, pellucid tone and mingled poise and quickness of emotional response. In recitative and aria alike she never lets you forget that these cantatas are intense dramas of the soul: say, in the heightened urgency she brings to the repeated 'Wo find ich dich?' in No 32's

sublime opening aria (where oboist Xenia Löffler matches her in eloquence), or her heady joy, egged on by frolicking solo violin, in the final aria of No 57.

While Michael Volle successfully fines down his voluminous Wagnerian voice (he is an admired Wotan, Sachs and Beckmesser), he doesn't strike me as a natural in Bach. His singing, though not always ideally steady, has a certain no-nonsense directness. He is careful not to overpower Karthäuser in the duets, and on his own is impressively vehement – surprisingly agile, too – dispatching the enemies of righteousness in No 57's 'Ja, ja, ich kann die Feinde schlagen'. But his sturdy contributions are short on tenderness, colouristic subtlety and expressive engagement with the text – qualities found in spades in the recordings of Nos 32 and 57 by Barry McDaniel (with Fritz Werner – Erato, 1/05) and Peter Harvey (with Gardiner – SDG, 12/06, 12/10). Volle's limitations are all the more frustrating when set alongside the radiant Sophie Karthäuser, who on this showing is a Bach soprano in the class of Agnes Giebel, Elly Ameling and Arleen Auger – and it doesn't get much better than that. **Richard Wigmore**

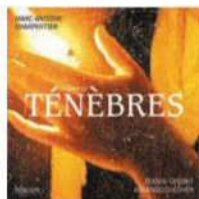
Charpentier

Leçons de Ténèbres - H120; H138; H123. *Litanies de la vierge*, H83. *Magnificat* a 3, H73. *Ouverture pour le sacre d'un évêque*, H536

Samuel Boden *ten* **Stéphane Degout** *bar*

Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen

Hyperion © CDA68171 (74' • DDD • T/t)



A new disc of delights from the sprawling oeuvre of Charpentier is always welcome, especially when it comes from an ensemble as reliable and adaptable as Arcangelo. A quick glance at the list of singers and instrumentalists gathered by Jonathan Cohen for these recordings is assurance enough that they won't lack for expertise, musicality or style.

Top billing has been given to three *Leçons de Ténèbres* for Holy Wednesday, with their anguished texts from the Lamentations. The booklet does not make it clear that, unlike Couperin's more famous settings, this is not a set but three separate pieces brought together. And nor do they sound like a set, for each has its own style and scoring: baritone, recorders and strings in the First Lesson; high tenor and continuo in the Second; and baritone, flutes and strings in the Third. They thus lack the unity of the Couperin, as well as some of its grace, but they are the works of a master nevertheless, full of the kinds of immediate melodic and harmonic expressive details Charpentier had learnt in Italy and assumed so effortlessly into his native style. The most lyrically attractive of them is the Second, superbly sung here by Samuel Boden, the latest in a distinguished line of English tenors to make themselves at home in the French *haute-contre* repertory. Stéphane Degout is less pliantly lyrical and involving in the other two Lessons but creates his own world of weary desolation.

These works are only half of the disc, however, for before them come three other pieces no less ravishing. The lovingly written *Litanies de la vierge* for six voices and instruments, the delicious *Ouverture pour le sacre d'un évêque* and the skilfully turned ground-bass *Magnificat* for three male voices (Boden, Thomas Walker and Ashley Riches) have been recorded before by Les Arts Florissants (Harmonia Mundi, 5/80, 9/89) and – minus the *Magnificat* – Ensemble Correspondances (Harmonia Mundi, 11/13), and if Cohen does not quite match the firm-toned urgency of those, his more transparent performances are no less tender and sensitive. **Lindsay Kemp**

G Davison

Awake, my soul. Most high, glorious God.

Missa pro defunctis^a. Wessex Service

^a**Rachael Lloyd** *mez* ^a**Philip Dukes** *va*

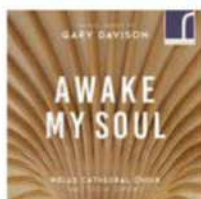
Wells Cathedral Choir / Matthew Owens with

David Bednall *org*

Resonus © RES10211 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Ravishing: conductor Jonathan Cohen and lutenist Thomas Dunford recording Charpentier with Arcangelo



This is the second disc of choral music by American composer Gary Davison that

Matthew Owens and his excellent Wells Cathedral Choir have released. The first, 'The Armour of Light' (Regent, 2016), was also the first commercial recording devoted solely to Davison's work and included a number of pieces written especially for the ensemble. The second, 'Awake My Soul', continues that relationship, with Davison's Requiem Mass, commissioned by the choir in 2015, as its centrepiece.

That Davison is a practising church musician himself (organist and choirmaster since 1995 at St Francis Episcopal Church, Potomac, Maryland) is evident in the skill with which he writes for his forces, achieving maximum dramatic, textual and sonic impact with music whose relatively simple demands put it well within the reach of most church choirs. Wells, however, are a crack team, and the Requiem (scored for choir, organ, mezzo and viola) gives them some welcome additional scope.

The booklet note makes much of Davison's debt to Duruflé and Fauré but

it's the influence of Stanford, Bainton and Bairstow we hear first in the title-track – a solid piece of declamatory diatonicism. The rest of the disc settles into an attractive if rather generic liturgical style with one foot in the past (a fauxbourdon set of canticles, plenty of chant-like melodies and modal harmonies).

The Requiem's additional forces give us some sumptuous viola-playing from Philip Dukes and some vibrant colours from the Wells Cathedral organ, played here by David Bednall. There are echoes of Frank Martin in the fretful incantation of the *Kyrie* and of Howells in the soaring writing for viola that weaves itself around the voices in the Gradual and Offertory. Both Wells' boy and girl choristers are credited here and bring an easy brightness to the sound. The work is an efficient one – liturgically functional, textually vivid – without being especially memorable.

Alexandra Coghlan

Dufay

'The Dufay Spectacle'

Apostolo glorioso. Ce jour de l'an. Ecclesiae militantis. Entre vous, gentils amoureux. Estrinez moy, je vous estrineray. Et pour certain. Je me plains piteusement. Je requier a tous amoureux. Je vous pri. Las, que feray?

ne que je devenray?. Mon bien, m'amour. O sancte Sebastiane. Portigaler. Puisque vous estes campieur. Quel fronte signorille. Resvellés vous et faites chiere lye. Salve flos Tuscae gentis. Se le fatze ay pale. Se la phase pale. Vasilissa, ergo gaude. Vergene bella

Gothic Voices with **Clare Wilkinson** *mez*
Jane Achtman *viuela d'arco/fiddle* **Andrew Lawrence-King** *org/regal/bray hp/psaltery* **Keith McGowan** *douçaine/shawm* **Emily White** *sackbut*
Linn © CKD568 (67' • DDD • T/t)



Back in the 1990s, the highlight of my reviewing year was almost always the arrival of a new CD from Christopher Page and Gothic Voices – not just for their supreme musicianship but also for the originality of the programming and presentation. Then Page withdrew from the group and for the past 20 years their existence has been far more peripheral to the early music scene. What a pleasure, then, to be able to welcome this Dufay recording as matching all the qualities that made Gothic Voices absolute leaders in the field. This time it looks very much as though Julian Podger is the presiding

genius; and he has chosen the repertory very well, imagining a celebration at some point late in Dufay's life and framing the entire proceedings with various versions and fragments of one of his most inspiring early songs, 'Ce jour de l'an'.

Adding glory to the occasion are five of his motets, presented in what seem to me the most intelligent and musically transparent performances. Here the influence of Andrew Lawrence-King seems important, not just because he plays so many different instruments but because he has the neat idea of adding a 16-foot pitch only at crucial points within the motets: others have done this before but never with the same restraint, intelligence and musical power. One could question some of the choices of instruments here but never the quality of the musical results.

To mention all the glorious details here would break the banks of this review but I cannot avoid mentioning the marvellously experienced singing of Catherine King and her duetting with Steven Harrold: that is seriously classy. And the entire package is beautifully assembled by Linn. **David Fallows**

Kilar

Missa pro pace

Joanna Woś *sop* Małgorzata Walewska *mez*

Paweł Brożek *ten* Rafał Siwek *bass*

Choir and Orchestra of the Podlasie Opera and

Philharmonic / Mirosław Jacek Błaszczyk

Dux © DUX1413 (68' • DDD)



Wojciech Kilar's music may be known to you even if you do not know

his name, since he wrote scores for films by Polanski and Coppola, not to mention a vast number of films made in Poland, but his concert music has not really travelled outside his native country. Like Górecki, he moved from being a composer who made use of the latest avant-garde techniques to one who preferred a greatly stripped-down language, and his large-scale choral and orchestral works ought to find a ready audience among admirers not only of Górecki but also of late-period Penderecki.

The *Missa pro pace* was written in 2000 to commemorate the centenary of the Warsaw Philharmonic. It is an emotionally charged work, beginning in the depths and gradually moving towards light (the dark background provided by cellos and double basses is a Kilar trademark). The light in this case is slow to dawn: the imploring *Kyrie* is relentlessly black and the atmosphere only changes with the bustling *Gloria*. It is quite

clear that the music's whole impetus is the movement towards the final words of the *Agnus Dei*, 'Dona nobis pacem'. The multi-sectional *Agnus Dei*, at nearly 20 minutes, is the longest movement of the work.

Kilar himself considered the work to be simple, medieval in character, and there are moments that do indeed suggest this – apart from the simplicity of the final section of the *Agnus Dei*, there are the homophonic *a cappella* 'Qui tollis' section of the *Gloria* and most of the *Credo*, for example – but it is nevertheless imposing and frequently majestic. The performance is one of absolute conviction; my only complaint would be that the vibrato of both soprano and mezzo-soprano soloists (Joanna Woś and Małgorzata Walewska respectively) is a little overwhelming at times, but this is merely a detail in this luminous recording.

Ivan Moody

Lalande

'Majesté – Grands motets pour le Roi-Soleil'

Deitatis majestatem. Ecce

nunc benedicite. Te Deum

Emmanuelle de Negri, Dagmar Šašková *sops*

Sean Clayton *haute-contre* Cyril Auvity *ten*

Andre Morsch *bass* Ensemble Aedes;

Le Poème Harmonique / Vincent Dumestre

Alpha © ALPHA968 (75' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Chapelle Royale, Versailles,

May 2017



Although Michel-Richard de Lalande is not the most frequently recorded

of French Baroque composers, he was certainly one of the major figures of his day, the man Louis XIV put in charge of his church music and who from that position of power fully plumbed the expressive potential of the imposing form of church piece for choir, soloists and orchestra known as the *grand motet*. He wrote over 70 during a period of nearly 40 years, but the three recorded here, all early examples from the 1680s, show that from the beginning he was able to handle the genre with assurance and imagination. These fine performances realise their majesty, variety and sheer style to the full.

Deitatis majestatem, majestatis potestatem, as its title suggests, is a work of dignified sweep, though one in which celebration of heavenly/earthly power is tempered by awed restraint. Lalande's control of momentum over eight shortish sections is masterful, his ability to sustain their mood effortless. *Ecce nunc benedicite* is more joyful

and simple in construction, with two choruses enclosing a more soulful central quartet that reaches up from the depths in wonder. And the *Te Deum*, one of his best-known works (heard here in a revised version from the 1710s) ranges from trumpet-and-drum militarism to the surprising, still reverence of 'Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus' to the most intimate music for soloists (the elegant, tender simplicity of 'Tu ad liberandum' is heart-melting). Indeed, in all these works one is repeatedly struck by Lalande's confident skill and diversity at setting words, indicating that he considered each section anew rather than slip lazily into the generic.

The recording was made at live performances in the Chapelle Royale at Versailles, gaining thereby in atmosphere (including what sound like distant fireworks at one point in the *Te Deum*), if at the usual (but slight) cost of presence and detail. Vincent Dumestre finds ideal blend and balance of both sound and texture among his forces, however, and reacts with skill and care to every one of Lalande's expressive demands. One need ask no more. **Lindsay Kemp**

Maciejewski

Requiem

Zdzisława Donat *sop* Jadwiga Rappé *contr*

Jerzy Knetig *ten* Janusz Niziołek *bass*

Warsaw Philharmonic Symphony Choir

and Orchestra / Tadeusz Strugała

Warner Classics © 9029 56826-0

(132' • DDD • T/t)

From Polskie Nagrania Muza PNCD039 (9/90)



Roman Maciejewski (1910-98) wrote his Requiem over a period of 15 years,

between 1945 and 1959, during which time he lived in Sweden and the United States. In fact, having left Poland in 1934 to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, he never returned to his native country.

The Requiem is dedicated to the victims of all wars; and since Maciejewski was convinced that music should be accessible to all listeners, he made a conscious decision to avoid anything remotely 'avant-garde'. The work is accordingly traditional in style and form, deliberately connected to the history of Western music (the thoroughgoing classical fugue that is the *Kyrie* is a good example). The orchestration is skilful (the inclusion of the piano is a particularly felicitous touch) and very atmospheric: the brooding introduction to the *Graduale* is particularly impressive. The



The Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, devote a disc to the elusive 16th-century composer William Mundy

gently glowing *Tractus* is perhaps the work's highlight but it has to be said that not all the music is equally memorable. In fact, it is very difficult to pin the composer's style down at all, even though there are suggestions of other composers from time to time throughout the work (for example Stravinsky, Frank Martin and, as one might expect, Verdi). It's intermittently impressive in spite of the fact that the composer's personal voice is somewhat elusive.

This disc is a reissue of a recording made as long ago as 1989 but it shows little sign of age. The performance is very good indeed, refined and exuberant as required, and all four soloists are outstanding.

Ivan Moody

Monteverdi • Marini

'Monteverdi in San Marco'

Marini Sinfonia **Monteverdi** *Messa a quattro voci*. *Gloria*. *Pianto della Madonna*. *Laetaniae della Beata Vergine*

Odhecaton / Paolo Da Col

Arcana Ⓢ A447 (61' • DDD • T/t)



Monteverdi's Venetian church music – whether written for St Mark's

or elsewhere in the city – is preserved selectively in the publications *Selva morale e spirituale* (1641) and the posthumous *Messa a quattro voci et salmi* (1650). Two works apiece from each anthology are performed by Odhecaton, joined as required by assorted strings, continuo instruments, and the cornett and trombones of La Pifarescha. An all-male choir sings the polyphonic *Messa a quattro voci* with warm luminosity, accompanied subtly by discreet continuo; it is an atmospherically immersive alternative to the lucid crispness of The Sixteen's recent interpretation (Coro, 6/18). Odhecaton use solo voices to beguiling effect in a few passages during a memorably sincere and affecting reading, although the soft-grained high countertenors occasionally stretch tuning a mite uncomfortably.

There is a switch of pace and an increase of flamboyance for the more modern concertato *Gloria* for seven-part voices (including female sopranos), two violins and four trombones (1641); there is plenty of splendour and dynamism in thrilling *tutti* sections and intimate expressivity in passages for assorted solo voices. The partnership of Alena Dantcheva and continuo players captures the expressive flexibility, emotional engagement and poetic intensity of Monteverdi's *stile*

rappresentativo in a dolorous account of the *Pianto della Madonna* (the Latin contrafactum of the lament from *Arianna*).

To conclude, Odhecaton's male-voice ensemble give an eloquent account of the simpler yet lovely *Laetaniae della Beata Vergine* (reprinted in 1650). Paolo Da Col's intelligent programme and sensitive direction balance a variety of styles and dimensions to perfection. **David Vickers**

Mundy

Beatus et sanctus. *Maria virgo sanctissima*.

Alleluia: *Per te Dei genitrix* – I; II. *Sive vigilem*.

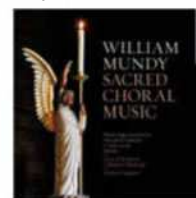
Vox Patris caelestis. *Adolescentulus sum ego*.

In exitu Israel (Sheppard/Byrd/Mundy)

Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh /

Duncan Ferguson

Delphian Ⓢ DCD34204 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Recordings entirely devoted to William Mundy don't abound; the most recent seems

to be The Sixteen's almost 20 years ago (Hyperion, 1/90), which included English-texted works as well as Latin. Here the focus is entirely on the latter, including the justly famous and oft-recorded *Vox patris caelestis*. Another lengthy work, *In exitu Israel* is a



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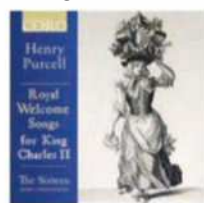
collaborative piece, to whose verse structure Sheppard and the youthful Byrd also contributed. But the gem of this particular recital is *Maria virgo sanctissima*, which rivals *Vox Patris* in scale. It has waited until now to be heard, for it is incomplete in its only source and has been reconstructed by Magnus Williamson, one of the pre-eminent scholars of this period. He's done a sterling job: the final 'Amen' is the passage that most strongly validates the effort of making the work performable once again. Some shorter selections round out the programme. Two impressive, short settings of *Alleluia: Per te Dei genetrix*, both claimed as premiere recordings, provide some respite from the surrounding leviathans. The equally concise *Beatus et sanctus* is a lovely opener, and *Sive vigilem* is pithy in another way, avoiding melismas. On this showing, Mundy's range is greater than some modern commentators give him credit for.

The Choir of St Mary's, Edinburgh, has a fine track record in this repertory, and the novelty value of this recital warrants a strong recommendation. The shorter selections are especially well handled, for they don't tax the singers unduly. In the lengthier selections they convey the sense of large-scale architecture even when the details flag. The imbalance of timbre between the straight-toned trebles (mixed, in this choir) and the lower voices obtrudes more than one might wish but that's not unknown in collegiate institutions. For what it's worth, the countertenor soloist audibly outclasses most of his adult colleagues, but at the start of *Vox Patris* his cameo upstages the first appearance of the trebles. (The Choir of Westminster Abbey's account – Hyperion, 12/08 – gets round this by assigning that part to lower trebles.) I also like Duncan Ferguson's forthright (dare I say it, un-churchy) approach to the lengthy passages of plainchant. **Fabrice Fitch**

Purcell

'Royal Welcome Songs for King Charles II' *Beati omnes qui timent Dominum*, Z131. *Fly, bold rebellion*, Z324. *Great God, and just*, Z186. *Let mine eyes run down with tears*, Z24. *O sing unto the Lord*, Z44. *Since the Duke is return'd*, Z271. *Sleep, Adam, sleep, and take thy rest*, Z195. *Welcome, Vicegerent*, Z340

The Sixteen / Harry Christophers
Coro © COR16163 (65' • DDD • T)



The Sixteen cleverly mix up secular, political and sacred pieces revolving

around flattering court odes that welcomed the king and his retinue back to Whitehall after trips around the country. Elegantly appointed strings and sweet phrasing are spot-on for *Welcome, Vicegerent of the mighty King* (c1680); its lovely soprano duet 'When the summer in his glory' (sung blithely by Kirsty Hopkins and Grace Davidson) and charming trio 'Music, the food of love' (led suavely by Nicholas Mulroy) would not be out of place in any of Purcell's operas. Indeed, Andrew Pinnock's note observes that elements of the delectable interfusion of solos, vocal ensembles and exquisite string ritornellos in *Fly, bold rebellion* (1683) are comparable to bits of *Dido and Aeneas* (which probably originated for the court about a year later).

The moralising songs *Sleep, Adam, sleep, and take thy rest* (published 1683) and *Great God, and just* (published 1688) are sung sweetly and with excellent diction by Hopkins. Five-part solo voices adroitly exploit each dissonance and textual detail of the lamentation *Let mine eyes run down with tears* (a verse anthem for Westminster Abbey, 1682). Likewise, eloquent solo contributions within a judicious quartet of voices are impeccably nuanced in the Latin psalm *Beati omnes qui timent Dominum* (c1680). A polite account of the catch *Since the Duke is return'd* is not quite rough enough around the edges for satirical tavern music at the bawdier end of Purcell's activities but the Chapel Royal anthem *O sing unto the Lord* (1688) benefits from the streamlined transparency and relaxed rhythmical precision of an eight-voice ensemble and string band of 12; Ben Davies's articulate bass solos and the small choir's astute harmonic shading of 'Let the whole earth stand in awe of him' are delightful, and the soft gracefulness of the closing 'Alleluia' is a refreshing change from robust larger-scale interpretations. Harry Christophers's sense of shapely natural pacing is unerring, although the frequent inclusion of anachronistic harp is a baffling whimsy. **David Vickers**

Rachmaninov

All-Night Vigil, 'Vespers', Op 37

Agnieszka Rehlis *mez* **Rafał Bartmiński** *ten*
Krzysztof Drugow *bass* **Choir of the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic / Violetta Bielecka**
Dux © DUX1404 (55' • DDD • T/t)



The Rachmaninov *Vigil* has become one of those works, rather like Mozart's

Requiem, of which one can never have too many versions. And, as with the Mozart, there exists an infinite variety of approaches. Violetta Bielecka summons an entirely convincing performance from the Choir of the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic, with a characteristically Slavic depth of sound, and there is also an understanding of the dramatic curve of the work, which is less easily apprehended (it is perhaps worth making the obvious point that Poland is a Roman Catholic country with a minority Orthodox population). And here is no linguistic problem, Poles having no difficulty singing in Slavonic.

We begin with the priestly invocation, which serves to frame the piece liturgically, and from then on are treated to a performance which is simultaneously respectful of its liturgical function and of its status as a dramatic choral work. Bielecka is not afraid of slow speeds, as 'Blagoslovi, dushe moye' shows, but there is never anything sentimental about this performance. 'Svete tikhi' is outstanding, as is the perfectly paced 'Bogoroditse Devo'. One might even find some of the enthusiasm found in such movements as 'Khvalite imya Gospodne' a little overblown but I would rather this than the kind of too-reverential approach that destroys the flow of this essentially text-driven music. And sometimes it pays real dividends, as in the 10th section, 'Voskresenie videvshe'.

The dramatic momentum never lets up, and this is an extremely important element in any performance of this work: it is all too easy to emphasise the importance of individual sections at the expense of the sense of the whole, and this Bielecka and her singers are careful never to do. The recorded sound (the recording was made at the European Art Centre in Białystok) is generous, but clarity is never lost.

Ivan Moody

A Scarlatti

Responsories for Holy Week

La Stagione Armonica / Sergio Balestracci
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 19075 80241-2
(70' • DDD • T/t)



It is not certain that all the music on this disc is by Scarlatti; the manuscript that

contains the nine Tenebrae Responsories for Holy Saturday and four Lenten motets is unsigned and in places incomplete. Conductor Sergio Balestracci is confident of their authorship, however, on stylistic

grounds and because Scarlatti is reported to have composed settings of these Passiontide meditations in 'the solid style of Palestrina' for the Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1708.

Not that anyone could actually mistake this music for Palestrina's. The *stile antico* may have been considered the appropriate manner for church music in Italy at this time but it was still up to a point an evolving style, and Scarlatti's little motets have their Baroque moments – a chromatic twist of the knife here, a dramatic word-isolation there. Anyone expecting anything remotely like the dynamic sacred music Handel was writing in Italy at this time – most notably *Dixit Dominus* – will be disappointed; but while this is essentially a rather austere listen, it is not a severe one. In fact the music is insistently beautiful, and if as a sequence the whole thing can seem a little featureless, it perhaps makes its impact best as a sustained background atmosphere of sorrowful contemplation.

The 16-strong La Stagione Armonica are not, it must be said, as smooth as many of the comparable mixed choirs in the field today, nor even as in tune, but the sound they make is appealing in its firm-throated expressiveness and in the way Balestracci's interpretative detailing somehow creates an air of simple yet fervent piety, as if this really were all about the sufferings of Christ – 'unsupported, alone and betrayed' as Scarlatti put it – and not about putting on a 'performance'.

The vocal sequence is punctuated by some muscly organ pieces played with aplomb by Carlo Rossi on the instrument of St Catherine's in Padua, and rather splendid they sound too. **Lindsay Kemp**

Schubert

Am Flusse, D766. Am See, D746. An den Mond, D259. An den Mond, D296. An die Entfernte, D765. An die Leier, D737. An Mignon, D161. Auf dem See, D543. Erlkönig, D328. Erster Verlust, D226. Ganymed, D544. Im Haine, D738. Liebhaber in allen Gestalten, D558. Meeres Stille, D216. Der Musensohn, D764. Nachtgesang, D119. Nacht und Träume, D827. Nähe des Geliebten, D162. Wanders Nachtlied II, D768. Wehmut, D772. Willkommen und Abschied, D767. Der Zwerg, D771

Ian Bostridge *ten* **Julius Drake** *pf*

Wigmore Hall Live (M) WHLIVE0091 (70' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live, May 16, 2015



Six months after I reviewed the third volume of Ian Bostridge's live

Schubert series from the Wigmore Hall (12/17), here's the next. On this occasion there's perhaps less of a detectable theme (Richard Stokes's generous booklet note offers no scene-setting introduction to the programme), but there's no shortage of great songs for Bostridge and Julius Drake to sink their teeth into.

Only two tracks in, for example, we get on to 'Der Zwerg', given in a characteristically lean and mean performance. Bostridge's tenor is aquiver with suspense, with consonants vivid and vowels wrung out for all their expressive potential, while Drake is implacable and forthright in the accompaniment. Further on, the pair also offer a wonderful account of 'Erlkönig': Drake rattles through the opening imposingly and Bostridge relishes the storytelling like few others, offering an especially engaging impersonation of the Erl-King himself, all snarling lip-curl and insidious promise.

It's a performance that is followed by a well-earned round of applause, one of the few signs of the disc having been recorded in concert; there's applause also after the lovely, concentrated account of 'An den Mond' (D296) that concludes the recital. I feel the polite titter and tentative clapping after a sparkling account of 'Liebhaber in allen Gestalten' could have been edited out, though.

As with the previous volume, one notices how Bostridge's voice and interpretative manner add levels of sophistication that are perhaps not always called for in some of the more straightforward songs – and one notices especially an inability to match the uncomplicated *joie de vivre* Drake communicates in much of the piano-writing (try not to tap your foot along to his springy way with 'Der Musensohn', 'Willkommen und Abschied' or the jolly oom-cha-cha of 'Im Haine'). The tenor's top can be a bit thin, too, the lower range a bit gravelly. But his performances are always wonderfully engaged and engaging, and few singers convey as much faith in Lieder or willingness to explore their expressive potential. As before, this is a disc well worth exploring. **Hugo Shirley**

R Strauss

Acht Lieder aus Letzte Blätter, Op 10 – No 2, Nichts; No 3, Die Nacht; No 8, Allerseelen. Sechs Lieder, Op 17 – No 2, Ständchen. Vier Lieder, Op 27. Drei Lieder, Op 29. Fünf Lieder, Op 32 – No 1, Ich trage meine Minne. Vier Lieder, Op 36 – No 1, Das Rosenband; No 2, Für fünfzehn Pfennige; No 3, Hat gesagt – bleibt's nicht dabei. Sechs Lieder, Op 37 – No 3, Meinem Kinde; No 5, Herr Lenz. Sechs Lieder, Op 67 – No 1, Wie erkenn ich mein Treulieb;

No 2, Guten Morgen, 's ist Valentinstag; No 3, Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre. Fünf kleine Lieder, Op 69 – No 3, Einerlei; No 5, Schlechtes Wetter. Malven, AV304

Maria Bengtsson *sop* **Sarah Tysman** *pf*

Dabringhaus und Grimm (F) MDG922 2062-6 (63' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Maria Bengtsson is an experienced soprano with many major Strauss roles on her

CV, and here she brings plenty of creamy tone and vocal security to a satisfying selection of the composer's songs. There's no personal statement from either Bengtsson or the excellent Sarah Tysman in MDG's booklet but it seems as though their approach to the repertoire, despite the soprano's rich operatic pedigree, constitutes an attempt to reclaim these songs as Lieder rather than as arias manqués, as works of reflection and introspection rather than extroversion (and overexertion).

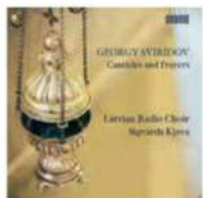
Barnstorming is avoided, with the climaxes of such songs as 'Allerseelen' and 'Heimliche Aufforderung' dialled down: the first, despite a leisurely tempo, resolutely avoids sentimentality; the second almost grinds to a halt in its final verse at 'Und will an die Brust dir sinken', and resolutely resists getting carried away later on. It's a fascinating approach, and one that is maintained with admirable consistency and restraint. It does also undoubtedly result in a couple of lovely performances: listen to their unusually hushed 'Traum durch die Dämmerung', for example, the moving intimacy of their 'Nachtgang' or the patience of their 'Ruhe meine Seele'.

But I also found myself starting to long for a bit more, for some extra excitement, for some passionate excess. And matters aren't helped by the fact that Bengtsson's characterisations remain rather generalised – she doesn't do a great deal with words, leaving much of the comic potential of 'Schlechtes Wetter', for example, unexplored. The voice, though undoubtedly beautiful, also has a slight haziness to it (at least as captured here), and doesn't always grab the note as firmly as one would like. Tysman plays a 1901 Steinway model D and obtains some beguiling sounds from it, but the instrument's somewhat mellow tone adds to the recital's slightly unassertive feel. Not a fully satisfying listen, then, but an often fascinating one nonetheless.

Hugo Shirley

Sviridov

Canticles and Prayers. The Red Easter
Latvian Radio Choir / Sigvards Kļava
 Online ⑥ ODE1322-2 (66' • DDD • T/t)



This is a beautiful selection of Sviridov's choral music. There is a subtlety to phrasing of the Latvian Radio Choir's performance of the Trisagion (track 2, 'Holy God'), for example, that often eludes Russian and Ukrainian choirs. And this serves them well too in the remarkable *Having beheld a strange nativity*, especially in the last movement, with its 'increasing' alleluias, and their mastery of dynamics means that they can bring it down to the quietest of *pianissimos* in nanoseconds.

The cycle on texts from the Old Testament is less familiar but has similarly outstanding moments – the second, 'Sprinkle me with hyssop', is particularly memorable in its alternation of male and female and choral groups – and in fact strikes me as one of the most likely works on this disc to enter the repertoire of Western choral ensembles. 'Taynaya vechera' might also do so, but here I come to my most serious reservation regarding this disc, which has nothing to do with the wonderful performances but everything to do with the disastrous translations in the booklet. It is simply not possible to translate 'Paskha krasnaya' as though it were modern Russian rather than Slavonic – 'The Red Easter' is not an adequate substitute for 'Beautiful Easter' and in this context carries quite the wrong connotations – and 'All-Waving Mother' as a translation of anything at all ought to have caught the attention of a copy-editor. As for 'It is worth eating' for the Marian hymn 'Dostoyno est', words fail me.

Do buy this disc, listen to the frequently wonderful music and the consistently astounding performances but recycle the booklet. **Ivan Moody**

'Cantata'

'yet can I hear ...'

J Christoph Bach Ach, dass ich Wassers g'nug hätte **JS Bach** Ich habe genug, BWV82 **Handel** The Choice of Hercules, HWV69 – Yet can I hear that dulcet lay. I will magnify thee, HWV250b. *Mi palpita il cor*, HWV132c. *Siete rose rugiadosa*, HWV162 **M Hoffmann** Trauermusik, 'Schlage doch, gewünschte Stunde' **Vivaldi** Pianti, sospiri e dimandar mercede, RV676

Bejun Mehta *countertenor*
Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin

Pentatone ⑥ PTC5186 669
 (72' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



The American countertenor Bejun Mehta has one of the best voices in the business. Full, free and with real power behind it, it sits unapologetically at the operatic end of the countertenor spectrum, with a lovely natural spin to it. He's also an unusually thoughtfully programmer, as his latest recital bears out.

'Cantata' traces the development of the solo cantata as it moves from Italy to Germany and England and from secular to sacred themes. The genre, Mehta demonstrates, embraces an unusually eclectic and wide-ranging set of styles and preoccupations; and if the resulting programme feels more like a collage than a coherent set of complementary works, it offers plenty of surprises and unexpected points of musical dialogue.

To plunge straight from the opera-in-miniature that is Handel's *Mi palpita il cor* to Bach's *Ich habe genug* is startling. From gilded coloratura display and the mannered pathos of Handel at his most artful to Bach at his most sober, most severely beautiful is a shift of philosophy as well as style. But while both are sung with the same easy brilliance and musicianship (obligato contributions from flute and oboe respectively are typical of the overwhelming excellence of the orchestral playing by the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin) they also share the same delivery from Mehta.

The pronounced portamentos and mannered expression that feels acceptable and organic in the Handel (and elsewhere in Vivaldi's *Pianti, sospiri e dimandar mercede*, even in Johann Christoph Bach's dramatically charged *Ach, dass ich Wassers g'nug hatte*) seem overdone, dare I say even vulgar, in the JS Bach, which suddenly has the uncomfortable sense of an opera-in-church-vestments about it. More successful, and much more intriguing, is Melchior Hoffmann's graceful *Trauermusik*, its tolling bells marking the passing of time, and a meltingly lovely 'Yet can I hear that dulcet lay' from *The Choice of Hercules* (an oratorio cuckoo in the nest) brings the recital to a strong close.

Is the baggy, generous, catch-all genre of the cantata genre really united by more than divides it? I'm not sure the case is quite as straightforward as Mehta here makes out. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Chimère'

Baksa Heart! we will forget him **Barber** Solitary Hotel **Debussy** Fêtes galantes (premier recueil) **Gurney** Sleep **Loewe** Ach neige, du Schmerzenreiche **Poulenc** Banalités. *Métamorphoses* – C'est ainsi que tu es **Previn** Three Dickinson Songs **Schumann** Dein Angesicht, Op 127 No 2. Die Lotosblume, Op 25 No 7. Mignon, 'Kennst du das Land', Op 98a No 1 **Wolf** Eichendorff Lieder – No 3, Verschwiegene Liebe. Mörike Lieder – No 7, Der verlassene Mägdlein; No 38, Lied vom Winde; No 45, Nixe Binsefuss
Sandrine Piau *sop* **Susan Manoff** *pf*
 Alpha ⑥ ALPHA397 (58' • DDD • T/t)



As Sandrine Piau explains in a brief booklet note, this album completes

a leisurely triptych that started with 'Evocation' a decade ago (2/08) and continued with 'Après un rêve' (7/11). It's been a bit of a wait, and 'Chimère' appears on Alpha rather than on Naïve, but it's certainly been worth it. The title seems primarily to provide the excuse for some lovely illustrations from across the centuries in the lavish hardback book that houses the physical disc; and the theme of the recital is perhaps better understood as dreams and, in Piau's words, 'the crazy urge to make our dreams come true'.

As before, the repertoire is eclectic and, also as before, Susan Manoff offers supremely sensitive and subtle piano-playing to complement singing of intense beauty: beguilingly gentle of timbre, Piau's is a voice that can bloom sensuously at the top, and which she controls exquisitely. It's a long time since I've heard a more purely gorgeous account of Wolf's 'Verschwiegene Liebe', for example, and her performance of Gurney's 'Sleep' took my breath away on first listening – and on subsequent listenings, for that matter – made all the more seductive by Piau's slightly relaxed, tension-free (and pretty much accent-free) way of singing in English.

She and Manoff cast their spell right from the start, though, with a yielding and deeply touching account of Loewe's 'Ach neige'. The three Schumann songs left me longing for more – the performance of 'Dein Angesicht' is another highlight. Reviewing 'Après un rêve', Richard Wigmore drew attention to Piau's less than ideally sharp consonants singing German, and it's true that she could do more with some of the words here too (one notices a lack of definition in 'Nixe Binsefuss'), but it

seems a small price to pay for such musical and heartfelt performances.

There's no such issue, of course, with Piau's French, and she is by turns witty and seductive in Debussy and Poulenc. She's terrific, too, in Robert Baksa's 'Heart! we will forget him', Barber's wonderfully subtle 'Solitary Hotel', as well as the *Three Dickinson Songs* by Previn that conclude the recital.

In short, though one might quibble with certain interpretative aspects of individual performances, this is one of the most fascinating, satisfying and moving recital discs to have come my way for some time. It's beautifully recorded too. **Hugo Shirley**

'O lux beata Trinitas'

Britten Festival Te Deum, Op 32 **Byrd** O lux beata Trinitas **Chesnokov** Cherubic Hymn, Op 29 No 5 **Glinka** Cherubic Hymn, Op 31 No 11 **Grechaninov** Cherubic Hymn, Op 29 **G Jackson** Hymn to the Trinity **MacMillan** Mass - Sanctus and Benedictus **Pacey** Tres sunt **Rachmaninov** Cherubic Hymn, Op 31 No 8 **Ross** Duo Seraphim **Sheppard** Libera nos, salva nos I & II **Stainer** I saw the Lord **Stanford** Psalm 150, 'Laudate Dominum' **Tchaikovsky** Cherubic Hymn **C Wood** Hail, gladdening light

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Graham Ross with **Nicholas Morris, Eleanor Carter** org
Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2270 (75' • DDD • T/t)



And so Graham Ross and the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, reach the end of their

musical pilgrimage through the church year. What began back in 2013 with 'Music for Advent' now reaches its conclusion five years and nine discs later with a celebration of Trinity Sunday – the final feast day of the liturgical calendar. What a triumphant finish it is. The same breadth of repertoire, the thoughtful, creative programming, the consistent, quality performances that have characterised every volume in the series continue here in a collection that pairs works from the English choral tradition (Byrd and Stainer, Britten and Gabriel Jackson) with those from Russia (Tchaikovsky, Grechaninov, Chesnokov, Glinka).

The full-throated directness and declamatory warmth that swells so instinctively through Stainer's *I saw the Lord*, Wood's *Hail, gladdening light* and Britten's *Festival Te Deum*, bursting out most jubilantly in Stanford's setting of Psalm 150, also works beautifully for the Russian music. The opening *Cherubic Hymn* by Grechaninov (five different *Cherubic*

Hymns introduce the album's five sections, each of which offers a different perspective on the Trinity) shows off the choir's fine low basses, while Glinka's spreads out its choral blend like a fine-woven cloth.

As usual there is also a smattering of new works. The *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* from James MacMillan's Mass offer no peaceful blessing but one curiously troubled by desperation and doubt, balancing the contemplative sweetness of Joshua Pacey's *Tres sunt*. Most interesting though is Ross's own *Duo Seraphim*, whose two duelling soprano voices conjure beings of dazzling strangeness – the alien creatures of a medieval illumination rather than rosy-cheeked Victorian angels.

This really is exceptional singing – immaculately balanced and blended, with text always at its heart. Ross and his young singers have given us quite the gift in this series. I can't wait to hear what they do next. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Perpetual Night'

17th-Century Ayres and Songs by **Johnson, Lawes, Coprario, Ramsey, Lanier, Banister, Webb, Hilton, Hart, Blow, Purcell** and **Jackson Lucile Richardot** mez

Ensemble Correspondances / Sébastien Daucé
Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2269 (72' • DDD • T)



The title may be 'Perpetual Night' but there's absolutely nothing gloomy or unremitting about this delicious disc and its chiaroscuro play of shading and texture. In a programme of 17th-century English lute songs, airs and dramatic scenes, mezzo Lucile Richardot, Sébastien Daucé and Ensemble Correspondances take their listeners through a restless night of grief, despair and troubled sleep before morning comes, and with it music that charms the senses once again into delight.

But it's the album's parallel, historical narrative that is, if anything, more interesting. Mining the neglected period between Dowland and Purcell for its musical interest, Richardot and her collaborators explore the French influence that helped take vocal music from court to commercial theatres, birthing that most English of musical genres: semi-opera.

Promoted from supporting act to main event, works by Lawes and Locke, Robert Ramsey and John Banister reveal rather startling musical secrets. The bold dissonance and volatile harmonic shifts of Lawes's 'Music, the master thy art is dead' and 'Whiles I this standing lake' are

painted with Caravaggio-like depth by Richardot (such a compelling Penelope in John Eliot Gardiner's touring *Ulisse*, whose inky tone combines the best of countertenor brilliance and mezzo earthiness), while the Judgement of Paris is vividly dramatised in John Hilton's 'Rise, princely shepherd', and operatic energy absolutely bursts from Banister's 'Amintas, that true hearted swain'.

The 12-strong instrumental ensemble (who elevate this recording with the embroidered detail, variety and palimpsest-shading of their accompaniments) are also enriched by a fine quartet of singers, who take consort song close to arioso in Robert Ramsey's expansive setting of Herrick's 'Howl not, you ghosts and furies', taking chamber music right to the brink of staged musical drama.

Lawes and Locke may never quite have Purcell's pulling-power on a recording but that disparity has rarely sounded more misplaced than it does here.

Alexandra Coghlan

'A Rose Magnificat'

Howells Salve regina **Lane** There is no rose **Leighton** Of a rose is all my song **MacMillan** Ave maris stella **M Martin** A Rose Magnificat **Park** Ave maris stella **Sheppard** Ave maris stella **Tallis** Videte miraculum **Warlock** As dew in Aprylle **R White** Magnificat **Wylkynson** Salve regina **Gabrieli Consort / Paul McCreesh**
Signum © SIGCD536 (78' • DDD • T/t)



The soprano solo that opens Leighton's *Of a rose is all my song* flowers out of frosty

silence, gradually pushing out its shoots into a full-blooming, modal melody that seems to belong at once to the 15th-century world of its text and to the 20th of its composer. It's an extraordinary marriage of music and text, and an evocative start for this exquisitely crafted recital of English Marian motets and *Magnificats* from the Gabrieli Consort and Paul McCreesh.

The vogue for pairing Renaissance and contemporary choral works is well established but this is a programme that draws the dialogue between the two repertoires into fresh animation. Sharing not only their polyphonic textures but also their medieval and Renaissance texts and modal harmonies, these are works whose musical tradition and genealogy is still a living concern (and not just alive but interestingly so), as we hear in pieces by Jonathan Lane, Owain Park and Matthew Martin.



Deeply touching: Sandrine Piau urges us to dream with heartfelt performances on her album 'Chimère'

Britten is the missing link in a programme that starts with the 'virile polyphony' of the Eton Choirbook and Wylkynson's *Salve regina* (its vast Gothic architecture boldly carved by the consort) and ends with the disc's title-track, newly commissioned from Matthew Martin, going by way of Tallis, Warlock and Howells. It's his ghost that lingers over both Lane's *There is no rose*, which nods to the earlier composer's *Hymn to the Virgin*, and Park's *Ave maris stella*, with its Brittenish way with a scale – at once ingenuous and ingenious. Performances are pristine: carefully balanced and always cleanly tuned, and a more muscular, characterful top line offers a welcome contrast to some of the ensemble's English rivals.

McCreesh's ear for a contemporary classic is unerring, and this is a programme to win new audiences for composers who aren't (yet) household names. The Park and Lane, along with MacMillan's *Ave maris stella*, are easy wins but it's Martin's *A Rose Magnificat* that demands a second and third return to the disc. This large-scale troped setting (which holds the lovely 'There is no rose' within its liturgical text) is a major new work, and one whose densely virtuoso choral writing and clever construction are married to a really tender treatment of text. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Sibylla'

E Cole I saw you under the fig tree **Hildegard of Bingen** Laus trinitati. O Pastor animarum **Lassus** Prophetiae Sibyllarum **Tymoczko** Prophetiae Sibyllarum **Gallicantus** / **Gabriel Crouch** Signum © SIGCD520 (53' • DDD • T/t)



The *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* have had several outings on disc, mostly with

mixed, medium-sized choirs (Daedalus, Vocalconsort Berlin, Brabant Ensemble). This new account offers another option, one voice on a part and adult male voices (already represented in the catalogue by The Hilliard Ensemble). Gallicantus's superb account of the composer's swansong, the *Lagrime di San Pietro* (12/13), already marked them out as distinguished interpreters of Lassus. They are lighter on their feet than The Hilliards, helped along by a dry rather than a church acoustic. Remembering their *Lagrime* set, perhaps, they make greater play with the beat than most other readings (try the nicely judged slowdown towards the end of 'Sibylla Cimmeria'), though the sinuosity of Lassus's lines is such that they might

have done still more. Still, this warrants a top recommendation, for Gallicantus surpass the mixed ensembles technically and edge The Hilliards' more reverential account interpretatively.

A difficulty with programming the *Prophetiae* work is deciding what to put alongside it. (The Hilliards paired it with Lassus's four-voice Requiem, an uncomfortable choice that drew attention to the lack of interpretative contrast between the two.) Gallicantus have taken the bolder decision to commission companion works, here a set of prophecies by the American composer Dmitri Tymoczko (*b1969*) setting texts by Jeff Dolden. There are a few nods to Lassus but in general Tymoczko follows his own path, with reminiscences here and there of Ligeti's *Nonsense Madrigals* (echoing perhaps the obsessively numerical, statistical bent of the texts). His settings are a sympathetic foil to Lassus on the whole, steering clear of the 'holy minimalist' tendency towards which early vocal consorts so often gravitate in similar commissions. The short, whimsical piece by Elliott Cole brings an intriguing project to a close.

Fabrice Fitch

Lassus – selected comparison:
Hilliard Ens (9/98) (ECM) 453 841-2

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month **David Threasher**'s point of departure is ...

Mozart's Requiem, K626 (1791)

Mozart's final unfinished masterwork must be one of the most written-about pieces of music in the repertoire. That's partly because of its quality, but the myths surrounding its commissioning and composition, as well as the fact that it lay only partially complete at its creator's death shortly after midnight on December 5, 1791, have all added to its mystique. While it sits in a solid centuries-old tradition of music for mourning, it was perhaps the first major church work to make the transition from liturgical observance to concert-hall staple. And, as Mozart's first large-scale church work since the great C minor Mass of almost a decade earlier, it marks the beginning of what was to be an ultimately unfulfilled new direction not only in his late style but also for religious music itself. Here are five journeys that take this flawed masterpiece as

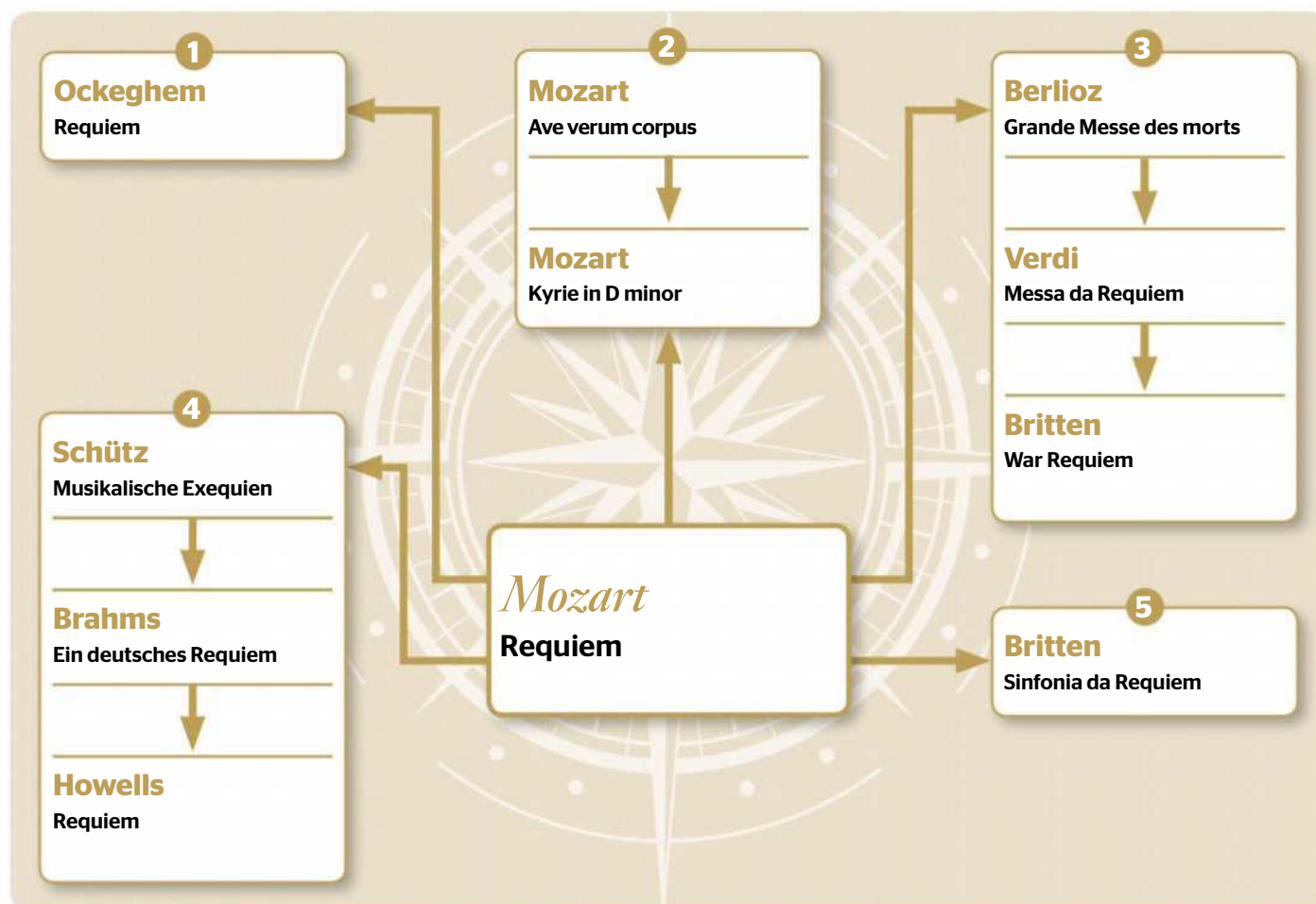
their starting point. And for a recording of the Requiem itself, the Dunedins on Linn (Recording of the Month, May 2014) is a must.

● Dunedin Consort / Butt (Linn, 5/14)

1 *The earliest Requiem*

Ockeghem Requiem (1461 or 1483) The earliest surviving setting of the Requiem Mass by a single identifiable composer is this magnificent and varied work by Johannes Ockeghem (c1410-97) – although some of the movements commonly set at the time are missing (the *Sanctus*, *Communion* and *Agnus Dei*), and it may once have contained still further music. This polyphonic setting was composed for the exequies either of Charles VII (1461) or of Louis XI (1483) ... the mystery lingers.

● The Clerks' Group / Wickham (ASV Gaudeamus, 5/97)



2 Mozart in 1791

Mozart Ave verum corpus, K618 This mesmerising motet, accompanied by strings and organ and clocking in at only 46 bars, is Mozart's last completed sacred work. To the Bach scholar Christoph Wolff it appears 'to reflect the repudiation of a style of instrumentally lavish church music', a style that 'was to flower in the Requiem'. Others have suggested that its artless simplicity might be due to the choir for whom it was written being not much good. Nevertheless, its disarming charm and inwardness have ensured its place near the heart of the choral repertoire.

● Handel and Haydn Society / Christophers (Coro, 1/12)

Mozart Kyrie in D minor, K341 More mystery: 1791 or 1781? The disappearance of the autograph means that we can't tell whether this sumptuous work was composed in Munich at the same time as the opera *Idomeneo* (whose huge orchestra it shares) or during the late efflorescence of Mozart's interest in sacred music – or, indeed, whether it was even completed by Mozart. Whatever, its dark sonorities and searing chromaticism place it very close to the archaic sound world of the Requiem.

● Collegium Vocale Gent; La Chapelle Royale / Herreweghe (Harmonia Mundi, 5/97)

3 Dramatic Requiems

Berlioz Grande Messe des morts, Op 5 (1837) The text of the Requiem – especially the 'Dies irae' sequence at the heart of the work – has always attracted the leading dramatists of the day. Berlioz threw all he had at his Requiem, including a well-stocked percussion kitchen and four brass bands. Even then, he stipulated that this massive orchestra be doubled or tripled if the chorus numbers reached up into the 700s or 800s – and even suggested that a corps of 10 tenors sing the solo line.

● K Lewis; Frankfurt Rad Chors & Orch / Inbal (Brilliant Classics, 3/90)

Verdi Messa da Requiem (1874) 'An opera in ecclesiastical garb', deadpanned Hans von Bülow about Verdi's largest sacred work. It's a barb that has stuck – 'Verdi's greatest opera', and so on – but it can be no surprise that this supreme operatic composer screwed the drama of the Day of Judgement up to a peak of tension and characterisation that has hardly been equalled. His Aida and Amneris fronted the vocal quartet at the work's premiere.

● Chor & Orch of Accademia di Santa Cecilia / Pappano (Warner, 10/09)

Britten War Requiem (1962) For the reconsecration of Coventry Cathedral in 1962, Benjamin Britten offered a grand public Requiem on a Verdian scale. The true message, however, is encoded in the settings of the First World War poetry of Wilfred Owen, offering a parallel commentary on 'war and the pity of war'. The 'strange meeting' between the male soloists, playing the parts of two soldiers on opposing sides, can still chill the bones even after almost 60 years.

● London Sym Chor & Orch / Britten (Decca, 5/63)

4 Requiems to other texts

Schütz Musikalische Exequien, Op 7, SWV279-81 (c1635/36) Not for Heinrich Schütz the traditional Catholic text. Instead, for the funeral rites of Henry II, Count of Reuss-Gera, Schütz set passages from the Lutheran Bible and by north German writers including Luther himself. Henry himself chose the texts and commissioned Schütz to compose the music. Supposedly the first German-language Requiem, the three parts of this grand work were



An angel from Giotto's fresco *The Last Judgement* (c1305) in Padua's Scrovegni Chapel

to cast a long shadow over later funerary music.

● Vox Luminis / Meunier (Ricercar, A/11)

Brahms Ein deutsches Requiem (1865-68) Brahms, too, eschewed the Latin text and settled on a series of passages from the Lutheran Bible, some of which were set by Schütz and – in English – by Handel in *Messiah*. The Last Trump remains, but any mention of Christ is sidestepped. Brahms said he would happily have called the work 'A Human Requiem' rather than *A German Requiem*; it is clear that his concern was less for the departed than for those of us who remain.

● Philh & Chor / Klempner (Warner, 2/62)

Howells Requiem (c1932-33) Herbert Howells's Requiem was thought to have been written following the death of his nine-year-old son Michael in 1935 but it seems it was begun even earlier, although it only saw the light of day in 1980. Parts of it were reused in the larger-scale *Hymnus Paradisi* but the Requiem itself is of a contained, unique and personal intimacy. Howells retains the Latin of the opening of the Requiem but interleaves lines from the Psalms and the Book of Common Prayer in this exquisite, ineffably moving work.

● Ch of St John's College, Cambridge / Robinson (Naxos, 1/00)

5 A Requiem without words

Britten Sinfonia da Requiem (1940) Perhaps not the work the Empire of Japan was expecting for the celebration of its 2600th anniversary, Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* fell foul of the Japanese authorities who commissioned it for 'insulting a friendly power' with its Christian basis and its 'gloominess'. What they did not recognise was that it was the finest orchestral work from the early period of the man who was to become Britain's most important composer. The halting 'Lacrymosa', minatory 'Dies irae' and cathartic 'Requiem aeternam' overlap as their sentiments are expressed in a form that does not want for drama despite its absence of text.

● New Philh / Britten (Decca, 9/65)

Available to stream at Qobuz, Apple Music and Spotify

Opera



Richard Osborne welcomes the reissue of an Ethel Smyth rarity:

'Smyth may have imagined *The Wreckers* as her Cornish *Tristan* but *Der fliegende Holländer* is the closer source musically' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



Mark Pullinger listens to *Un giorno di regno*, Verdi's only opera buffa:

'Judging from the booklet photos of this production, the plot has been relocated to a 1970s Italian pizzeria' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 96**

F Caccini

La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina

Michaela Rieger *mez* Alcina
Achim Schulz *ten* Ruggiero
Sabine Lutzenberger *mez* Melissa
Axelle Bernage *mez* Nunzia
Katelijne Van Laethem *sop* Sirena/Dama Disincantata
Matthew Vine *ten* Nettuno/Astolfo
Bernd Oliver Fröhlich *ten* Vistola/Fiume/Pastore
Huelgas Ensemble / Paul Van Nevel

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88985 33876-2 (89' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Francesca Caccini, daughter of the tempestuous professional singer

Giulio, a composer best known for his landmark song collection *Le nuove musiche* published in 1602, was brought up in the hothouse atmosphere of the musical establishment of the Medici court in Florence. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that her only surviving opera, *La liberazione di Ruggiero*, based on an episode from Ludovico Ariosto's widely disseminated epic poem *Orlando furioso*, is so markedly indebted to the Florentine style of *recitar cantando*, the new recitative style which her father so vigorously promoted. This central approach to vocal writing and delivery is enlivened in her score with arias, duets, trios and four-voice choruses to produce a dramatic vehicle endlessly varied in its ability to respond to shifting emotional states.

The libretto, by Ferdinando Saracinelli, centres on the battle between two sorceresses, Alcina and Melissa, over the warrior Ruggiero, here given a convincing performance by Achim Schulz (a pleasantly light but still authoritative tenor). It would certainly have been familiar to the elite courtly audience gathered to hear the first performance, mounted to celebrate the visit of Archduke Karl of Styria to Florence during the Carnival season of 1625.

Two arias stand at the emotional centre of the work. The first, performed by the Siren, is an exercise in the Renaissance tradition of Orphic song and is persuasively sung here by Katelijne Van Laethem in a dramatic account spiced with a rich vocabulary of embellishment overlaid on an accompaniment characterised by unexpected harmonic shifts. Particularly arresting in its depiction of a mind in despair is Michaela Rieger's delivery of Alcina's lament at being abandoned by Ruggiero, a second set-piece aria, which is clearly composed in the tradition for such pieces established by Monteverdi's legendary *Lamento d'Arianna*.

Beyond that, some of Caccini's most affecting and effective writing occurs in the self-contained chorus for Alcina's discarded lovers, transformed into enchanted plants, who plead with Ruggiero not to leave. Both here and in many other places the instrumentalists play with style and sensitivity, and the necessary scoring (the printed rubrics do not solve all the problems) has been applied with skill and imagination (though not all will approve of the added percussive elements such as the triangle, particularly noticeable in the *coro di damigelle*). *La liberazione* should finish with a staged dance; but since the score does not include it, Paul Van Nevel has selected a galliard by Salamone Rossi to bring the piece to a close. **Iain Fenlon**

Donizetti

Il borgomastro di Saardam

Giorgio Caoduro *bar* Tsar
Juan Francisco Gatell *ten* Pietro Flimann
Andrea Concetti *bass* Wambett
Irina Dubrovskaya *sop* Marietta
Aya Wakizono *mez* Carlotta
Pietro Di Bianco *bass-bar* Leforte
Pasquale Scircoli *ten* Ali Mahmed
Alessandro Ravasio *bar* Officer

Donizetti Opera Chorus and Orchestra /

Roberto Rizzi Brignoli

Stage director **Davide Ferrario**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic © 2 CDS7812; © DVD 37812;

© 57812 (102' • DDD • 108' • NTSC • 16:9 •

1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

CD includes synopsis, libretto and translation; DVD and Blu-ray include synopsis only



Il borgomastro di Saardam – 'The Mayor of Saardam' – is a *melodramma giocoso*, first performed in Naples in August 1827 with a

cast that included the Austrian contralto Karoline Unger as Marietta. This recording from Bergamo is based on the version seen at La Scala the following January; Donizetti's revision evidently included rewriting the part of Marietta for a soprano. Successful in Naples, the opera failed in Milan.

The plot is an invention but the setting is a true one. Peter the Great really did travel to the West, studying shipbuilding (among other things, including dentistry). The action takes place in the shipyard of the Dutch port of what is now called Zaandam. It was a popular subject for playwrights and composers: readers familiar with *Zar und Zimmermann* will – at second glance, perhaps – recognise the oddly named Wambett as Van Bett, the pompous burgomaster of Lortzing's *komische Oper*.

The story turns on the two Peters: the Tsar, under the name of Pietro Mikailoff, and Pietro Flimann, a Russian deserter. The Mayor has been ordered to arrest a shipyard worker called Pietro. Much confusion ensues, including an 'I'm Spartacus' moment when the two men and the chorus all claim to be called Pietro. Flimann is astonished to be hailed as Tsar. Wambett proposes to marry his ward Marietta, with whom Flimann is in love. In the end, the true Tsar is revealed: he forgives Flimann for deserting, appoints him admiral and blesses his union with Marietta.

There are echoes here of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and there is much Rossini in the score, notably the comic 'ensemble of perplexity' that concludes the first act. The opera fizzles along under Roberto Rizzi Brignoli, the general frivolity offset



Echoes of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*: *Il borgomastro di Saardam* – Donizetti's 1827 melodramma giocoso – gets a rare outing

by tender music for the lovers. There is one serious aria, 'Va e la nave', where the Tsar first vows to punish the traitors at home, then decides to forgive them, before exulting at the thought of Russia emerging from barbarism under his rule. Giorgio Caoduro sings this magnificently, right down to the embellishments in the second stanza of the cabaletta.

That aria, as elsewhere, is complemented by video projections: in this case, battle scenes followed by plans and illustrations of neoclassical buildings representing Peter the Great's vision of Western civilisation. There seems no particular reason for the Edwardian costumes, but Andrea Concetti's appearance as the Mayor in frock coat and cocked hat – not to mention his extravagant whiskers – is as splendid as his patter-singing is expert. The CD version includes the libretto in Italian and English. Great fun. **Richard Lawrence**

Handel

Arminio

Max Emanuel Cencic *countertenor* Arminio
Lauren Snouffer *sop* Tuscelda
Aleksandra Kubas-Kruk *sop* Sigismondo
Gaia Petrone *mez* Ramise
Juan Sancho *ten* Varo
Owen Willetts *countertenor* Tullio
Pavel Kudinov *bass-bar* Segeste

Armonia Atenea / George Petrou

Stage director **Max Emanuel Cencic**

Video director **Corentin Leconte**

C Major Entertainment © 2 DVD 744408;

© 744504 (168' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe, February 24 – March 1, 2017

Includes synopsis



Max Emanuel Cencic performs the dual role of both stage director and title-hero for this production, filmed at the Karlsruhe Handel Festival in March 2017. The Croatian countertenor, conductor George Petrou and his orchestra Armonia Atenea reprise functions from their studio recording (Decca, 5/16), and Juan Sancho also returns as the ill-fated Roman antagonist Varo (his brawny timbre is not ideal for Handel). The otherwise different cast is preferable: Lauren Snouffer is on sensational vocal form as Arminio's wife Tuscelda, and Aleksandra Kubas-Kruk has a rounded security of tone as the young hero Sigismondo; his beloved Ramise is Handel's least fleshed-out character but Gaia Petrone sings her arias with

ripe precision. The treacherous Segeste (father/father-in-law to all non-Romans) is depicted with bullying cruelty by Pavel Kudinov. Owen Willetts demonstrates excellent technique and musicality in the small role of the Roman captain Tullio.

There are only a couple of minuscule cuts to recitatives, and the visceral theatricality of the performance masks some clumsy tropes in the staging. The pseudo-18th-century setting presents what looks like an aristocratic French household (Arminio, Tuscelda and their supernumerary children and servants) being caught as they attempt to flee from Robespierre's thugs during the Reign of Terror; most scenes are populated by characters not supposed to be on stage, and all sorts of invented superfluous action often distorts the opera. For example, Sigismondo is wrongly portrayed as a foppish wimp, Ramise is added by an alcoholic haze, and their interactions are depicted via drunken puking, drug-taking and gratuitous carnality. At the end of Act 2 Tuscelda is shown to be raped by Varo (the libretto and music ought to make it sufficiently clear that the Roman invader is supposed to be moved to pity because he prizes virtue – and the production's distasteful contradiction causes his noble actions at the start of Act 3 to make very

little sense). During the final chorus – not performed but mimed to the recording by the cast holding gold masks – the ‘forgiven’ Segeste is taken outside and guillotined. Copious subversions of the personalities, motivations and actions of its characters makes it incongruous that Cencic enthuses (in a short booklet interview) that *Arminio* is one of Handel’s finest operas. I wouldn’t go that far – with nearly 40 extant operas to choose from, perhaps it makes the top 30 by the skin of its teeth. This is not to disparage the effectiveness of some excellent top-drawer music when experienced in dramatic context – in particular, the last few scenes of Act 2 and first few numbers of Act 3 emerge as a potent trajectory that depicts the crises of its main characters emotively. **David Vickers**

Mozart

Don Giovanni

Simone Alberghini bar..... Don Giovanni
Irina Lungu sop..... Donna Anna
Katerina Knežíková sop..... Donna Elvira
Julia Novikova sop..... Zerlina
Dmitry Korchak ten..... Don Ottavio
Adrian Sâmpetean bass..... Leporello
Jiří Bruckler bar..... Masetto
Jan Štáva bass..... Commendatore

National Theatre Choir and Orchestra /

Plácido Domingo

Stage director **Jiří Nekvasil**

Video director **Brian Large**

C Major Entertainment © 2017 DVD 745208;

© 2017 745304 (3h 2' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live at the Estates Theatre, Prague,
 October 27 & 29, 2017

Includes synopsis



The USP of this enjoyable production is that it comes from the Estates Theatre in Prague, the very building in which it

was first performed. You might therefore expect it to consist of the version that was seen there on October 29, 1787, especially as the article in the accompanying booklet is headed ‘As Mozart Premiered Don Giovanni Himself’; but what we have is the usual composite including the two arias that Mozart added when the opera was staged in Vienna. (For a summary of the difference between the Prague and Vienna versions, readers might care to glance at my ‘Collection’ article – 3/18.)

The conductor is Plácido Domingo and the cast includes four winners of his vocal competition, Operalia. One of the four is Simone Alberghini, who plays Don

Giovanni; he will be surprised to find himself described in the booklet as ‘the Italian star tenor’. The production by Jiří Nekvasil is a traditional one, played – to judge from the applause in the middle of the ‘Catalogue’ aria – before an audience of non-opera-goers. The set by Josef Svoboda (d2002) is a recreation of a Prague National Theatre production of 1969 and features theatre boxes on each side of the stage. The costumes by Theodor Pištěk are sumptuous (Donna Elvira’s cerise dress matched by her hat, hair, whisk and indeed luggage) bordering on OTT (the masked trio in the Act 1 finale). The filming is in the experienced hands of Brian Large, whose fondness for shots of the conductor rather detracts from the drama.

Alberghini makes an elegant Giovanni, romantic with a touch of irony. He is well served by Adrian Sâmpetean as Leporello: bearded, thinning on top and slightly seedy. Dmitry Korchak is a credibly vigorous Don Ottavio; it’s a pity that he takes a breath in the wrong place in the run up to the reprise in ‘Il mio tesoro’. The women are excellent. Irina Lungu is a powerful Donna Anna, dismissing Ottavio at the end of ‘Or sai chi l’onore’ with a gesture that irresistibly calls to mind Alan Sugar’s ‘You’re fired’ in *The Apprentice*. Katerina Knežíková is touching as Elvira, her ‘Mi tradi’ speedy, fluent, beautifully sung.

The appearance of the Commendatore in the Act 2 finale is disappointing, neither the singing nor the playing weighty enough. In general, though, there is much to admire in the conducting. Domingo, having not accelerated at the entrance of Anna and Giovanni, equally commendably keeps the orchestra moving when Anna is moping over her father’s body. Elsewhere he sometimes pulls the tempo about, but in compensation there’s some nice orchestral detail: the bassoons and oboe in Giovanni’s ‘Metà di voi’ are particularly charming. Beta plus-query-plus, I’d say, and a pleasant contrast to some horrors I could mention.

Richard Lawrence

Ricordi

La secchia rapita

Elcin Huseynov bass-bar..... Podesta of Modena
Giorgio Valerio bass..... Count of Culagna
Hyuksoo Kim ten..... Titta
Alessandro Ravasio bass..... City Historian
Laure Kieffer sop..... Countess of Culagna
Lucia Amarilli Sala mez..... Renoppia
Kaori Yamada sop..... Rosa
Margherita Sala contr..... Giglio
Dyana Bovolo contr..... Innkeeper
Chorus of the Claudio Abbado Civic Music School;
Giuseppe Verdi Symphony Orchestra, Milan /
Aldo Salvagno

Dynamic © CDS7798 (78' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Recorded live at the Auditorium di Milano,
 May 15-16, 2017



Giulio Ricordi will always be remembered as the tenacious publisher

who engineered Verdi’s collaboration with Boito and later championed Puccini, Giordano and Montemezzi, among others. Under the pseudonym Jules Burgmeier, however, he was also a composer in his own right, producing a number of orchestral and chamber works, along with three operettas, of which *La secchia rapita*, premiered in Turin in 1910, was the second.

Its source is Alessandro Tomassi’s scabrous mock epic of the same name, published in 1622 and later translated into English as *The Rape of the Bucket*, which satirises the futility of war in its depiction of the conflict that erupts between Modena and Bologna after the stupid Count of Culagna (the name means ‘arse-land’) filches a bucket belonging to a Bolognese innkeeper. The war, in turn, forms a backdrop to a series of erotic tales dealing with the multiple adulteries of Culagna and his Countess, and their relationships with Renoppia, an Amazonian warrior after the fashion of Tasso’s Clorinda, and the soldier Titta, who is sexually drawn, Cherubino-like, to every woman he meets.

Renato Simoni’s libretto downplays Tomassi’s scatological emphasis but fashions a beautifully constructed farce from the sprawling narrative. Influenced by both Verdi and Offenbach, the score, however, is uneven. Too much of the first act, in particular, is undistinguished, though Ricordi strikes form at its close with a pithy strophic song for Culagna which could have strayed from *La vie parisienne*, followed by a sextet finale, in which three parallel love duets develop in *Falstaff*-like counterpoint. Highlights later on include a deliciously louche trio, in which the Countess and Renoppia fight for the attentions of the more than willing Titta, and an affectionate parody of the Preziosilla scenes in *Forza*, when Renoppia leads Modena’s Women’s Army into battle.

The work enjoyed a moderate success in Italy in the years immediately after its premiere, but dropped from the repertoire, understandably perhaps, during the First World War. Dynamic’s new recording was made live last year in Milan, during its first modern revival – a series of concert performances without dialogue, its soloists

and chorus drawn from students from the Claudio Abbado Civic Music School. Like the work itself, it gets off to a tentative start, with Dyana Bovolo's Innkeeper, Laure Kieffer's Countess and Hyuskoo Kim's Titta all sounding hesitant in their opening numbers, though they gain in confidence as the performance progresses. Giorgio Valerio has terrific fun as the dimwit Culagna, and Lucia Amarilli Sala makes much of the emotional vulnerability that lurks beneath Renoppia's tough facade. Aldo Salvagno can't disguise the work's flaws but conducts with considerable élan. The booklet, meanwhile, gives Simoni's text complete, including the missing dialogue: it makes for entertaining reading, so have a look at it before you listen. **Tim Ashley**

Rossini



Mosè in Egitto

Goran Jurić *bass* Mosè
Clarissa Costanzo *sop* Elcia
Mandy Fredrich *sop* Amaltea
Dara Savinova *mez* Amenofi
Matteo Macchioni *ten* Aronne
Sunnyboy Diadla *ten* Osiride
Taylan Reinhard *ten* Mambre
Andrew Foster-Williams *bass-bar* Faraone

Prague Philharmonic Choir; Vienna

Symphony Orchestra / Enrique Mazzola

Stage director **Lotte de Beer**

Video director **Felix Breisach**

C Major Entertainment © 2017 DVD 744808;

© 2017 744904 (150' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the Bregenz Festival,

July 18 & 20, 2017

Includes synopsis



Much as the victim of a street mugging might ask 'Why me?', so one's tempted to ask 'Why *Mosè in Egitto*?', the exquisitely

crafted *azione tragico-sacra* which Rossini completed in Naples in 1819. What, then, was the cue for this 2017 Bregenz Festival staging and why was it entrusted to the Dutch duopoly of theatre director Lotte de Beer and Theatre Company Hotel Modern, a group of progressively minded puppeteers best known for filmed meditations on Auschwitz and trench warfare in the First World War?

The answer, so parts of the production would suggest, is 'refugees'. With Europe rocked by the Syrian conflict, the plight of the boat people and the larger diaspora of which they were a part, it probably seemed timely to track down an opera concerned with an older diaspora. That this particular story, taken from the book of Exodus, ends with a mass drowning may or may not have been germane.

The closing of the waters of the Red Sea over the pursuing Egyptian cavalry, as the Israelites make good their flight, came close to defeating Rossini's stage technicians, and some later ones too. So might film be the answer? Possibly. But not as realised here in a treatment where the opera's stage action is largely suppressed – we hear but rarely see the singers in Act 3 – in favour of dimly filmed images of insect-like puppets approaching their doom in broiling deserts and turbulent seas. Even the great prayer in which Moses pleads for his people's salvation counts for little amid such images. To add to the horror, a preface has been added to this third act in which snatches of a Rossini march are interwoven with a howling desert wind, the squawks of birds of prey and a baby's cry.

Hotel Modern's trio of onstage puppeteers are allocated a rather different role in Act 1 in the great quintet with chorus which follows Moses's restoration of the light. 'Amazement freezes my heart', the populace cries, at which point soloists and chorus are made to freeze (except when singing) as jeans-clad techies painstakingly

transform them into a visually beautiful but theatrically redundant *tableau vivant*.

In creating the opera, Rossini and his librettist grafted an *Aida*-like love story on to the biblical narrative. This mostly plays out in the musically superb second act, where puppets have no place and where the director, faced with the specialised demands of visually static *bel canto* opera, is patently at a loss. Even the death of Osiride, a genuine *coup de théâtre*, is ineptly handled. Not that she's helped by Bregenz's utilitarian sets and often risibly inadequate costumes.

The company boasts an impressive trio of male leads, led by Goran Jurić's Moses. Elsewhere there are problems, though these are of passing concern in a staging where neither Rossini's music nor the needs of the individual players appear to be in the forefront of the producers' minds.

Richard Osborne

Smyth



The Wreckers

Peter Sidhom *bar* Pascoe

David Wilson-Johnson *bar* Lawrence

Brian Bannatyne-Scott *bass* Harvey

Anthony Roden *ten* Tallan

Annemarie Sand *mez* Jack

Justin Lavender *ten* Mark

Anne-Marie Owens *mez* Thirza

Judith Howarth *sop* Avis

Huddersfield Choral Society; BBC Philharmonic

Orchestra / Odaline de la Martinez

Retrospect Opera © 2017 RO004 (128' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London,

July 31, 1994. From Conifer CDCF250/51 (11/94)

Includes synopsis and libretto



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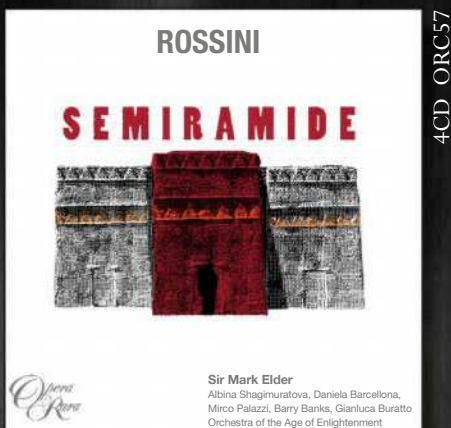
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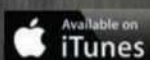
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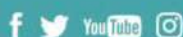


La Reine de Chypre
by Halévy

Véronique Gens

and Cyrille Dubois, Étienne Dupuis,
Éric Huchet, Christophoros Stamboglis

ORCHESTRE DE CHAMBRE DE PARIS
FLEMISH RADIO CHOIR
Hervé Niquet conductor



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photo © Marc Ribes - Erato/Warner Classics



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FRANÇAISE



Sensational vocal form: Lauren Snouffer impresses as the title-hero's wife Tuscelda in Handel's *Arminio* – see review on page 91

Concert, staged to mark the 50th anniversary of Dame Ethel's death. Originally released by Conifer in studio-quality BBC sound, it returns in this finely annotated reissue on the fledgling Retrospect Opera label.

The timing will seem apt, given Smyth's brief albeit rambunctious involvement with women's suffrage. But Retrospect Opera's interest is musical, not political. Its 2016 premiere recording of Smyth's comic opera *The Boatwain's Mate* (5/18) has recently acquired wider distribution and a premiere recording of her *Fête galante* is promised next year.

When Britten created *Peter Grimes*, a comparable piece to *The Wreckers*, he drew on George Crabbe's narrative poem 'The Borough'; Smyth, steeping herself in landscape and history, made her own scenario. Set in an impoverished fishing community in Cornwall in the 1780s, *The Wreckers* concerns (said Smyth) 'the plundering of ships lured on to the rocks by the falsification or extinction of the coastal lights; the relentless murders of their crews; and, with it, all the ingrained religiosity of a Celtic population which, at the time, had become the scene of Wesley's great religious revival'. When the pastor's idealistic young wife Thirza and her lover

expose the evil, they are condemned as subversives and adulterers, and immured in a sea-cave where they drown.

England in 1904, the year of the work's completion, was not a 'land without music' but it was, creatively speaking, a 'land without opera'. Little wonder, then, that *The Wreckers* was sired elsewhere and had the strangest of genealogies. Conceived in English but with a French libretto, it had its premiere, at Artur Nikisch's instigation, in German in Leipzig in 1906. It finally reached London, in an English back-translation, when Beecham mounted a production at His Majesty's Theatre in 1909. The following year he presented it at Covent Garden, where another of the opera's admirers, Bruno Walter, shared the conducting.

Nikisch, Beecham, Walter: these were not negligible figures. Nor were these temporary enthusiasms. In a concert in Berlin in 1928, during which Dame Ethel became the first woman to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic, Walter conducted the 'Cliffs of Cornwall' prelude and love music from Act 2, with Rose Pauly, a celebrated Elektra, as Thirza, and the great Swedish Wagnerian Carl-Martin Oeman as her lover Mark.

Beecham thought so highly of the piece he feared that 'no Anglo-Saxon singer'

could rise to the challenge of the 'splendid and original' role of Thirza or catch 'a tithe of the intensity and spiritual exaltation' which Mark exudes. Well, Anne-Marie Owens and Justin Lavender come close in this 1994 performance, with powerful support from Peter Sidhom as Pascoe, the cuckolded pastor and village headman.

Smyth may have imagined *The Wreckers* as her Cornish *Tristan* but *Der fliegende Holländer* is the closer source musically. (The orchestral writing is especially fine, as the present performance eloquently confirms.) The role of Mark's teenage admirer Avis (the admirable Judith Howarth) is an odd lapse: Bizet's Micaëla garlanded with phrases lifted directly from *Carmen* herself. But that is by the by. *The Wreckers* is a music-drama which for the most part steers its own courageous course.

Like Graham Vick's thrilling 1983 Warwick University production, this 1994 performance confirms its revivability. Meanwhile, how strategic was Britten's silence on the subject? *The Wreckers* was staged at Covent Garden in 1931 and again at Sadler's Wells in 1939: a lavishly praised production broadcast live by the BBC the week before Britten sailed for the United States on April 29. **Richard Osborne**

Verdi

Un giorno di regno

Gocha Abuladze *bar*.....Belfiore
 Elisabeth Jansson *mez*.....Marchesa del Poggio
 Valda Wilson *sop*.....Giulietta
 Giuseppe Talamo *ten*.....Edoardo
 Davide Fersini *bar*.....Baron Kelbar
 David Steffens *bass*.....La Rocca
 Daniel Dropulja *bar*.....Delmonte
 Leon De La Guardia *ten*.....Count Ivrea
 Czech Philharmonic Choir, Brno;
 Cappella Aquileia / Marcus Bosch
 Coviello ② ③ COV91802 (101' • DDD/DSD)
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation
 Recorded live at Festspielhaus Congress Centrum,
 Heidenheim, July 25-28, 2017



Un giorno di regno
 was Verdi's only
 opera buffa, an early
 work composed

in 1840 and a far cry from the mellow, autumnal comedy of *Falstaff*, written deep into his retirement. It's hardly great music but it is full of pretty *bel canto* melodies and patter numbers that one could easily mistake for emanating from the pen of Rossini or Donizetti.

Usually translated into English as 'King for a Day', the opera charts the escapades of the Cavaliere di Belfiore, who is masquerading as Stanislaus I, the Polish king, for political purposes. He uses his disguise to engineer a few romantic encounters, including his own reunion with the Marchesa del Poggio, who had broken things off when she suspected his infidelity. It's a farce, an operatic situation comedy, but passes its 100 minutes pleasantly enough.

This recording on Coviello comes from staged performances at the opera festival in Heidenheim in 2016 where, judging from the black-and-white booklet photos, the plot was relocated to an Italian pizzeria in the 1970s. Thankfully, very little stage noise can be discerned. Marcus Bosch leads the Cappella Aquileia in a buoyant account of the jaunty Overture, the main theme of which returns in the opera's finale. His cast are young but decent, although it can't hold a candle to the starry ensemble gathered under Lamberto Gardelli's baton for Philips' early Verdi series.

Weirdly, there is no cast list to be found anywhere. You have to trawl through the biographies to see who is singing each role and even then the character of La Rocca is only referred to in the libretto as the Tesoriere (treasurer), making it difficult to match him to bass

David Steffens. Gocha Abuladze has quite a marked vibrato going on but sounds not unlike Enzo Dara or Fernando Corena, so is in the right vocal mould for the role of Belfiore. Tenor Giuseppe Talamo's Edoardo sounds a little pinched, certainly no match for the honeyed José Carreras on Philips, and Swedish mezzo Elisabeth Jansson has a few untidy moments as the Marchesa; but their trio with Valda Wilson's pearly Giulietta comes off nicely. The Act 1 *buffo* duet for Davide Fersini's Barone and Steffens's La Rocca is good fun and Bosch moves the ensembles on briskly. In short, an enjoyable outing for a rarity you're unlikely to bump into on stages outside Italy too often. **Mark Pullinger**

Selected comparison:

Gardelli (9/74^R, 12/89^R) (PHIL) ➔ 475 6772PM2

Wagner

Das Rheingold

Iain Paterson *bass-bar*.....Wotan
 David Stout *bar*.....Donner
 David Butt Philip *ten*.....Froh
 Will Hartmann *ten*.....Loge
 Reinhard Hagen *bass*.....Fasolt
 Clive Bayley *bass*.....Fafner
 Samuel Youn *bass-bar*.....Alberich
 Nicky Spence *ten*.....Mime
 Susan Bickley *mez*.....Fricka
 Emma Bell *sop*.....Freia
 Susanne Resmark *mez*.....Erda
 Sarah Tynan *sop*.....Woglinde
 Madeleine Shaw *mez*.....Wellgunde
 Leah-Marian Jones *mez*.....Flosshilde
 Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder
 Hallé ③ ③ CDHLD7549 (164' • DDD)
 Recorded live at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester,
 November 27, 2016
 Includes synopsis; libretto available from
halle.co.uk



The third instalment
 of the Hallé's slowly
 assembling *Ring*
 cycle – this episode

from a concert and rehearsals in November 2016 – is an even greater triumph for the orchestra than their preceding *Götterdämmerung* and *Walküre*. Not only is there a special gloss on the sound (strings especially), a real Wagnerian *Klang*, but the manner in which the solos (both sectional and individual) are now taken bears witness to the fluency of freshly acquired experience.

Evidently relishing the sonorities he is now getting from his band, Mark Elder's handling of the score has at times an almost Karajan-like indulgence of sound

for sound's sake (although I can hear Reginald Goodall muttering in disagreement: 'what is music but sound?'). The only problem with that is a lack of pulse where, in this still extraordinary score of all-recitative, we might want to push on from the dramatic point of view. Here both the opening events on the Rhine and the final confrontation from the re-entry of Freia with the giants spend a lot of time looking at the (beautiful) musical scenery. There is no lack of pace or drive (and occasionally an almost Solti-esque violence), however, in the big *scènes à faire* 2 and 3, where the incidents are skilfully dovetailed into another.

The cast are strongly characterised and not always as you might expect; some fresh thinking here. Iain Paterson is a real godly and super-cool Wotan, little of the guile-on-sleeve villainy that's become almost a norm. Plenty of evil from Samuel Youn's Alberich includes an over-the-top scream when he loses the Ring. Lots of subtlety and detail come from Susan Bickley's Fricka and Emma Bell's Freia in those one-off phrases that too often slip by, while David Stout and David Butt Philip avoid caricature in truly sung portraits of the 'lesser' gods. Will Hartmann's less-is-more Loge fits in with his master; Reinhard Hagen and Clive Bayley's giants have the right mixture of sentiment (for Freia) and violence. Completing the cast are nice Rhinedaughters, a noble and straight Swedish Erda (Susanne Resmark from Decca's Copenhagen *Ring*) and a Mime (Nicky Spence) good with text who doesn't overdo his moaning.

The recording is once again technically spacious and clear. It's too soon to insert this new performance somewhere into the order of merit of the ever-increasing number of *Rheingolds* but a resampling of the old standards Solti (Decca), Karajan (DG) and Goodall (Chandos) will give you an idea of its comparative virtues.

Mike Ashman

'Siface'

'L'amor castrato'

Agostini Il ratto delle Sabine - Hor ch'in sopor profondo; Sorgi o bella da le piume; Voglio guerra Bassani Il Giona - Core misero. La tromba della divina misericordia - Overture Cavalli Scipione Africano - Hora si ch'assai più fiero Giannettini Ingresso alla gioventù di Claudio Nerone - Con un bacio; Languia d'amor Lonati I due germani rivali - Tremino, crollino Pallavicino Il Bassiano - Overture. Vespasiano - È pur caro il poter dire Pasquini I fatti di Mosè in Egitto - Ma nostre voci flebili. La sete di Cristo -



Sensual and exquisite: the countertenor Filippo Mineccia, with conductor Javier Ulises Illán, sings music associated with the 17th-century castrato known as Siface

Overture **Purcell** My song shall be alway, Z31.
Sefouchi's Farewell, Z656 **A Scarlatti** La Giuditta -
Dormi o fulmine **Stradella** San Giovanni Battista
- Overture; Amiche selve; Deste un tempo; Io
per me non cangerei; Soffin pur rabbiosi.
La Susanna - Overture; Ma folle è ben chi crede;
Voi donzelle che studiate

Filippo Mineccia *countertenor*
Nereydas / Javier Ulises Illán
Glossa © GCD623514 (69' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations



Filippo Mineccia's new recital takes as its starting point the circumstances surrounding the death, on May 29, 1697, of the castrato Giovanni Francesco Grossi, known Europe-wide as Siface after the role of the Numidian warrior in Cavalli's *Scipione Africano* in which he made his name in Rome in 1671. Depending on the age at which the operation was performed, castration did not necessarily preclude sexual activity in adulthood; and some months before his death, Siface, who spent most of his career in the service

of Francesco d'Este, Duke of Modena, began an affair with Elena Marsili, a widowed Countess at his patron's court, to the horror of her brothers, who conspired with hired assassins to have the singer shot.

To chart the progress of the affair, Mineccia creates 'a small imaginary opera-pasticcio for a single character' by forging extracts from the operas and oratorios with which Siface was primarily associated into an amatory, at times erotic, emotional narrative. The boundaries between sacred and secular are deliberately blurred as the saint's arias from Stradella's *San Giovanni Battista* are pressed into service to express sexual rather than spiritual desire, and a scene from Bassani's *Il Giona* hints at existential defiance as we approach the catastrophe. Francesco d'Este's sister was Mary of Modena, wife of James II. Siface famously worked in London during the latter's reign, though he apparently couldn't abide the climate and left earlier than anticipated. Mineccia includes Purcell's 'My song shall be alway', though whether it was written for Siface is debatable: its tessitura, one notices, lies fractionally

higher than the rest of the music Mineccia gives us here.

This is repertory, however, that for the most part suits his dark, handsome-sounding alto uncommonly well. Long, slowly unfolding lines are sustained with consummate ease and his coloratura has admirable liquidity. You're aware of pressure at times in his upper registers, and 'My song shall be alway', in particular, lies fractionally too high for him. Against that must be set the beauty of his soft singing. The *pianissimos* with which he begins 'Hor ch'in sopor profondo' from Agostini's *Il ratto delle Sabine* are at once sensual and exquisite, and the hushed, valedictory closing aria, 'Dormi o fulmine' from Alessandro Scarlatti's *La Giuditta*, is simply breathtaking. The Spanish period ensemble Nereydas play with precision and élan for Javier Ulises Illán, coming into their own in the orchestral extracts that signal shifts in mood as the recital progresses. It's a fascinating disc. Do listen to it. **Tim Ashley**

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Jeremy Pelt

Noir En Rouge: Live in Paris

HighNote © HCD 7314



At last – a live recording by Pelt's touring band. It's still a great shame that the trumpeter's earlier wonderful quintet with

JD Allen, Danny Grissett, Dwayne Burno and Gerald Cleaver only recorded one gig track (a storming blues), but this current group is extremely good. Pianist Gould, one of this writer's tips for future acclaim, is particularly inventive, as on 'Re-Invention' where Pelt refused to show him the sheet music and forced him to play what he heard from the rhythm section, with Barber's almost vicious drumming spurring him on. He also contributed the melodic 'Sir Carter' from his own debut album, which features a

particularly robust Pelt solo, as well as a decidedly Monk-ish piano intervention. The empathy between the five musicians becomes more evident with every listen, with the rhythm section extending the multi-tempo inventiveness of Miles' men in the mid-1960s. Pelt himself just gets better with every recording and he now has an instantly recognisable solo sound and style – and a knack for writing memorable compositions. A really rewarding album. **Tony Hall**

Kamaal Williams

The Return

Black Focus Records © BFR001LPX



Yussef Kamaal has said that he sees the piano as a drum, and *The Return* drops the piano trio format into an abstract

landscape of rhythm and texture. The introductory greeting of 'Salaam' is languid and loping, till Joshua McKenzie (aka McKNasty) triggers the jittery drums which have typified London since jungle's inception a quarter-century ago when, with their echoes of bebop understood, they quickly migrated into British jazz. 'Medina' befits its namesake Saudi oasis town where Mohammed is buried, clearing a space for reverberating keyboard chimes and genial rhythms. 'LDN Shuffle' then tellingly contrasts hometown to holy site, its claustrophobia deepened by Mansur Brown's guitar squall. The harp-like strums of Williams' keyboard on 'Broken Theme' and tough funk of 'Rhythm Commission' have roots in fusion's spiritual end. Mostly, though, this resembles a minor Peckham Picasso, compressing jazz and hip hop into alien forms. **Nick Hasted**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Norma Waterson & Eliza Carthy with The Gift Band

Anchor

Topic Records © TSCD594



Norma Waterson and her daughter Eliza Carthy have sung together ever since Eliza first grasped language. But they have made only one previous album, *Gift*, in 2010. After this Norma fell seriously ill. She has gradually recovered, but performances by this wonderful singer are now few and far between. It is, therefore, a joy and a relief to hear Norma's voice again, melding with Eliza's.

The album opens with 'Strange Weather' by Tom Waits, wanders into Peter Bellamy's setting of Rudyard Kipling's dirge 'The Widow's Party', and then on to the spiky jazz of Kurt Weill's 'Lost in the

Stars'. They brilliantly capture the spirit of Eric Idle's 'The Galaxy Song' and complete a circular paying of homage by singing 'Shanty of the Whale', which KT Tunstall wrote inspired by the singing of The Watsons. There is a rough scrape to Eliza's fiddle playing and the Gift Band provide a sometimes eerie accompaniment. Norma's voice has altered, as has Eliza's. There is a sense of having lived and arrived at this point in time, anchored by a lifetime's singing together. **Julian May**

Rahim AlHaj Trio

One Sky

Smithsonian Folkways © SFW40585



After escaping the Iraq-Iran war in the 1990s, the oud (lute) player Rahim AlHaj moved to the US; *Letters From Iraq*, his

gripping 2017 project for oud and strings, stirred emotions worldwide. AlHaj possesses a scintillating technique, and this album shows his penchant for upbeat, free-flowing tunes illuminated by his liquid sound: a celebration of life after the dramatic meditation on war of his 2017 album, even if from time to time a sombre melody or the bluesy, deeply resonant notes of the oud bring a hint of sadness and nostalgia, as heard on 'Wandering'.

The music is based on a meaningful dialogue between the Iraqi AlHaj and the Iranian Sourena Sefati on *santur*, the hammered dulcimer. Both play contrapuntal lines in addition to the melody, and engage in lively repartee, their shimmering sound driven by the fluid percussion of Palestinian-American Issa Malluf. Memorable melodies segue into extended improvisations of the highest order, creating an intense musical experience. **Francesco Martinelli**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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REPLAY PAGE 102

CLASSICS RECONSIDERED PAGE 104

Regal singing

Edward Breen listens to two complementary collections from the UK's favourite a cappella group

When two choral scholars from the famous choir of King's College, Cambridge formed an ensemble to perform secular music they could hardly have foreseen a half-century of world-class music-making. From the very start this ensemble consisted of two countertenors, one tenor, two baritones and a bass: a cluster of lower sonorities characterising a smooth, rich sound and underpinning their skillful falsettists. The King's Singers, as they became in 1968, were among the early music vanguard, that critical mass of ensembles who convinced us of alternatives to the prevailing styles. Certainly The King's Singers began to reimagine an early music sound from the earliest disc in this **Warner Classics** collection, their 1974 album 'English and Italian Madrigals'.

They recorded more than just madrigals, but their 'Madrigal History Tour' (1983) makes a sensible place to start. It was an inspired collaboration with Anthony Rooley whose own ensemble The Consort of Musicke had already set new standards for clarity of tone with Dowland: 'The First Booke of Songes' (1976). To understand what makes 'Madrigal History Tour' so special, one must revisit earlier recordings. Compare the Deller Consort in Bartlett's 'Of all the birds that I do know' (Vanguard, 8/58) and the Purcell Consort of Voices singing Archadelt's 'Margot labourez les vignes' (Argo, 7/72). Madrigals could be rather prim and contrived when an ensemble was defined by a traditional soprano sound. With nimble countertenors, The King's Singers found a lightness of touch crossed with an unflinching exactitude that could really get this music under the skin of listeners. They are at their best in tight, fast, witty homophonic textures such as in Lassus's pun-filled 'Matona mia cara' ('Madrigal

Collection', 1974) where a German knight serenades an Italian lady in an unfamiliar language, or in Senfl's bizarrely comical 'Das Gläut zu Speyer' which narrates the worries and frantic exertions of six church bell-ringers.

The care taken over such nuanced, intimate recordings marked something of a golden age for early music and was part of its appeal to listeners. Listening through this set today, it appears remarkable for its coherence of vision and consistency of tone. Many ensembles change personnel over time and The King's Singers are no exception in this, yet they managed in those early years to keep their vision so intact that it has retained essential parameters to this day. Their 1976 recording of Tallis's *Lamentations* has aged particularly well, and still strikes me as an intimate and thoughtful performance well worth revisiting.

The arrival of the countertenor David Hurley in 1989 lent a diaphanous sonority to the top line and a lightness of touch that is quite unrivalled. Similarly, the bass Stephen Connolly brought a new resonance to the lower end of the spectrum that enhanced and developed several characteristics of The King's Singers' sound to offer a steely perfection well suited to the stark honesty of CD sound. 'La Dolce Vita: Music in Renaissance Naples' (1990), a collaboration with the instrumental ensemble Tragicomedia and Nancy Hadden, still sounds deliciously fresh.

In 'The Complete RCA Recordings', we meet more singers: Bob Chilcott, Bruce Russell and, later, Nigel Short who all contributed innovative subtleties in line with the original ensemble philosophy. The album I consider to be the absolute essential King's Singers disc opens this collection: 'Good Vibrations' (1992). If you first listened to the madrigals and marvelled



at their delicacy, nothing you will find will prepare you for the astonishing difference in this tribute to favourite pop songs.

The sound is undeniably the same, as is the cheeky enjoyment of music-making and communication, but a spotlight has moved towards harmony and style. 'Good Vibrations' was the album of a lifetime, an outstanding achievement resting not only on the performances but also the arrangements: reharmonisation offering new contexts and complexities to familiar songs.

Moving forward to the quirky Gilbert and Sullivan album 'Here's a Howdy Do!' (1993), we hear incredible flexibility in operation: whereas the songs in 'Good Vibrations' were more abstract; these G&S numbers come back to an Anglican orbit, yet remain archly playful at the same time. Occasionally this cleverness veers too far: 'Tit Willow' – which I have always felt a simple, melancholy song – is here perhaps an example of over-gilding the lily?

Nestled in this RCA collection is 'Renaissance' (1992), a beautiful album of music by Josquin Desprez. Unfussy yet heartfelt, it sits modestly alongside the more adventurous projects as a reminder of the versatility of this world-famous ensemble. ⑥

THE RECORDINGS

The King's Singers:

Madrigals & Songs from the Renaissance
Warner Classics © ⑧ 9029 57028-2

The King's Singers:

The Complete RCA Recordings
RCA Red Seal © ⑪ 8898 547018-2

BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan enjoys box-sets of Mahler, Bruckner, Bernstein and Russian piano concertos

A collection of **Mahler's** Symphonies Nos 1-9 featuring recordings by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, some of them previously available, includes a number of memorable interpretations. Sir Colin Davis's July 1995 account of the Eighth (previously on RCA) trades textural weight for luminosity with a satisfying musical payoff. The Ninth under Mariss Jansons, a performance that has already appeared twice on the orchestra's own label, counts warmth among its principal virtues and although Jansons's Seventh is in most key respects fairly similar to the 2016 Royal Concertgebouw version that Edward Seckerson found so dull (3/18) this 2007 Munich alternative parades a degree of edge, wit and audaciousness that was significantly lacking in Amsterdam. Bernard Haitink presides over a majestic, emotionally potent Third and an affectionate Fourth, Jansons brings out the Fifth's full quota of raging rhetoric (and doesn't allow the *Adagietto* to drag), Daniel Harding fine-tunes the Sixth's tragic underlay (placing the Scherzo third), Jansons brings fervour to the Second, and Yannick Nézet-Séguin steers the First with a light touch. I played the discs in quick succession and enjoyed every minute.

Nézet-Séguin's **Bruckner** symphony cycle with the Montreal Metropolitan Orchestra (again, Nos 1-9 only) holds its own even in the face of some formidable competition. Of particular interest is the fact that Symphonies Nos 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, and the first three movements of 8, are all said to be presented in editions from the 1930s by Robert Haas. However, according to the ever-reliable Bruckner discography at abruckner.com the Third is given in the 1873 original version, edited by Leopold Nowak [1977] and the Eighth in '1887/90 mixed versions, edited by Haas [1939]' whereas here we're told by Atma that the Eighth's finale is presented in a 1951 Nowak edition. I'd say that only in the case of the Third – which in playing terms exceeds the Nowakian norm by 10 minutes or more, many of those minutes fairly unfamiliar – are the textual anomalies of much general importance. What matters most are the contours of the performances, with the Eighth and Ninth parading as monolithically monumental, the Sixth's first movement as uncommonly



urgent, the Fifth as heroic, and the rest subscribing to a clean-cut, dramatic template that is typical of this highly gifted conductor. The sound is extremely good with an especially strong (and musically effective) bass line in the Eighth. In terms of digital rivalry, Dennis Russell Davies (with the Bruckner Orchestra Linz on Sony Classical) is also excellent, though his choice of the radically different and extremely expansive early version of the Eighth is likely to divide opinion.

Alsop's complete recordings for Naxos help focus an accurate perspective on Bernstein the composer

Nézet-Séguin's new live DG recording of *Mass* (5/18) ignites the spirit of a still-controversial work, while Marin Alsop's equally engaging 2008 Baltimore performance of this **Leonard Bernstein** work is rather better balanced in sound. Its presence in the context of Alsop's complete Bernstein recordings for Naxos helps focus an accurate perspective on Bernstein the composer, aided by some fascinating premiere recordings, the gnomic CBS Music for example, based on material written for the network that had relayed Bernstein's fabled Young People's Concerts. Then there are the orchestrated *Anniversaries* (1944-89), originally piano vignettes but that work wonderfully well as arranged by Garth Edwin Sunderland, the dedicatees ranging from the pianist William Kapell (a mere 26 seconds for a firefly who died at a tragically young age) to Bernstein's late wife Felicia Montealegre, also ill-fated long before her time (aged 56). But maybe the most fascinating inclusion, aside from the revealing DVD 'Leonard Bernstein – Larger than Life', is a joint effort written by various composers (Berio, Corigliano, Druckman, Foss, Kirchner, Schuman, Takemitsu and John Williams)

in celebration of Bernstein's 70th birthday. Called *A Bernstein Birthday Bouquet*, it's, in effect, a set of variations of 'New York, New York' from *On the Town*. You'll have fun spotting the other quotations, not only from Bernstein's own music but from that of Beethoven, Wagner and Bruckner. As for Alsop, whether she's in Bournemouth, Baltimore or São Paulo, always there's that sense of enthusiastic authority, never overbearing (in the way Bernstein himself could be) which works in the music's favour. Nothing gets in the way and I often found myself thinking (regarding works that I hadn't previously been too sure about): 'Maybe there's more to this than I thought.'

Similar thoughts occurred to me while surveying the contents of Brilliant Classics' 15-disc collection '**Russian Piano Concertos**', the two Glazunov concertos for example, both of them sensitively played by Oxana Yablonskaya. Not a few of these mostly rare works fall to Michael Ponti whose Vox recordings of piano concerto 'esoterica' predated Hyperion's pioneering Romantic Concerto series for the digital age. But perhaps the most astonishing piece here is Alexander Mosolov's Piano Concerto No 1, Op 14, boldly mechanistic music redolent of Mosolov's *Iron Foundry* and compellingly played by Steffen Schleiermacher. Those who find Prokofiev's Fifth Piano Concerto unacceptably barbed will turn away despairingly. Those who don't will likely love it. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Mahler Symphonies Nos 1-9 **Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra** / various conductors
BR-Klassik © 11 900714

Bruckner Symphonies Nos 1-9 **Montreal Metropolitan Orchestra** / Nézet-Séguin
ATMA Classique © 10 ACD2 2451

Bernstein: Marin Alsop – The Complete Naxos Recordings
Naxos © 8 + DVD 8 508018

Russian Piano Concertos various artists
Brilliant © 15 95520

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Sir Thomas Beecham ablaze in concert

Should you need a reason to rush out and buy ICA's **Sir Thomas Beecham** set – for example, something that marks it out as way above the norm quality-wise – go straight to the 1959 broadcast of Brahms's Second Symphony and beam up the finale from 5'25" in, where the tension starts to build and Beecham really hammers the transition to the lovely second theme before pushing the pulse once more, with everyone going hell for leather. At 7'40", as the coda draws near, the conflagration seems to light up the sky, as thrilling as any performance since Toscanini's day.

The *Adagio non troppo* is also exceptional; the warming strings theme at 3'44" and the welling drama thereafter confirming this as one of Brahms's most emotionally compelling works. It was always a Beecham favourite, as was Beethoven's Second (the coupling on disc 3); both are works familiar from the conductor's discography (as is everything else in this set), but these live performances from the 1950s confirm a level of intensity that the studio recordings merely implied, and never mind about the odd imperfection. I love the energy of Beethoven's *Allegro con brio* and the badinage in the finale, the quick-witted, feather-light strings alternating with brutal *tutti* interjections – Beecham at his most compelling.

Liszt's *Eine Faust-Symphonie* cries out for the liberating performing context of a live performance, and fine though Beecham's studio version is (Warner), in the live version here, the stormier sections are drawn into clearer dramatic focus, the narrative granted an extra degree of urgency – especially in 'Mephistopheles'. There's that magical, *Tristan*-esque passage around 10'04" into 'Gretchen' when cellos and violins answer each other over a burbling woodwind accompaniment – beautifully done here. And I've rarely heard the closing 'Chorus mysticus' (with tenor Alexander Young and the Beecham Choral Society) sound quite so enchanting. The entire work comes across as very much of a piece.

Another example of the 'Beecham touch' at its most beguiling occurs at 7'56" into

A Midsummer Night's Dream overture, where you note how lyrically the strings respond to the winds (with just a hint of portamento), the rise and fall of the musical line and the coda – pure thistledown, again with sweetly expressive violins.

Who was more adept than Beecham at making instrumental music approximate the human voice? Mozart was always a Beecham speciality, more crisply Classical pre-war than post-war, when a tendency to heighten dynamic contrasts intensified the music's inherent sense of drama. Try from 7'21" near the close of the *Linz* Symphony's first movement to sample what I mean by dynamic shading, especially the wistful, almost throwaway diminuendo. Mind you, I wasn't quite sure about the massive rhetorical *ritardando* at the close of the movement. There are no exposition repeats, nor in Haydn, but with so much going on in performing terms, you hardly need them. The *Linz*'s Menuetto features an especially transparent trio; and in the finale, Beecham and his players create a real whirlwind (join them at 1'38"), matched – in my experience, and on modern instruments – only by Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (RCA). The E flat Symphony (No 39) enjoys the most magical transition from the opening *Adagio* to the ensuing *Allegro*, the pace slowing appreciably before the first theme wafts in on a quiet cue from pizzicato basses, though there's plenty of animated argument later on.

Prior to listening to Beecham's Haydn in the context of this release I'd been enjoying Bernstein's mostly 1970s survey of the 'London' symphonies for Sony. In the great E flat (No 99), beyond the *Emperor*-like opening chord, the two conductors tread similar paths tempo-wise, though Bernstein's more Beethovenian approach leads on to a grittier, more emphatically stated *Vivace assai*, whereas Beecham marks a crescendo at 3'22" (Bernstein doesn't) and amusingly lets the witty drooping motif from 3'37" die away on a coy little diminuendo. Bernstein plays the repeat, but Beecham doesn't – though, interestingly, he marks a *ritardando* at the onset of the

development section. Beecham is at his sensitive best in the *Adagio*, which has an intimately conversational quality to it, again aided by carefully graded dynamics. The *Clock* Symphony is similarly stylish, with prominent timpani and an especially urgent account of the first movement, though in the trio of the village-band-style *Menuetto* the purposely unchanging 'wrong note' accompaniment to the flute at 3'26" is altered to sound rather more harmonious, which was generally the norm in Beecham's day.

Two more overtures complete the deal. I've already mentioned *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is mostly superb. *Der fliegende Holländer* is disarmingly tender wherever the Senta motif is quoted, storm-tossed elsewhere (those timps really have a field day). Boccherini's engaging *Sinfonia* (Overture) in D, Op 43, is given with the sort of urbane rumbustiousness that was so typical of Beecham, and the playing of the RPO is (as elsewhere throughout the set) rich in subtleties. The mono recordings date from between 1954 and 1959 and have been extremely well remastered. Numerous live Beecham releases have appeared over the last few years, some more successful than others (in both recording and performance terms), but this collection is certainly one of the best.

THE RECORDING



Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven,
Brahms, et al
RPO / Beecham
ICA Classics (M) (4) ICAC 5148

Two great cellists

Here is **Mstislav Rostropovich**'s 1962 Edinburgh Festival performance of Dvořák's Cello Concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Carlo Maria Giulini – and how different it is compared with the studio recording he made with Giulini and the LPO in 1977. Quite apart from the later version's extra breath, there's the upwards scale at 4'19" into the finale



Sir Thomas Beecham's recordings with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra have been revived by ICA Classics

where both here and in the recording Rostropovich made with Sir Adrian Boult there's a real swagger to the soloist's delivery, as he climbs the line slowly at first then really goes for it. Giulini obligingly lets him finish before cueing the next *tutti* (the versions with Giulini in 1977 and Karajan with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1968 are very plain by comparison). It's what you might call a 'real' performance, 'typical Rostropovich' in its blend of hushed self-communing and lacerating attack, and the rapport with Giulini and his orchestra seems fairly watertight.

The coupling is interesting in that we're offered **Jacqueline du Pré's** first public performance of Schumann's Cello Concerto (also 1962, with Jean Martinon and the BBC SO) – it's a nice version, though the very opening is a little prosaic. Things hot up considerably as the work progresses, and du Pré plays Paul Tortelier's cadenza, which, as Tully Potter informs us in his excellent booklet notes, she later jettisoned. The slow movement is warmly played, whereas the faster sections of the finale are characteristically extrovert. As to the performance overall, I'd call it a revealing glimpse at an interpretative route that would in due course take this great artist deeper, and much further forwards. In both cases, the mono sound is good.

THE RECORDING



Dvořák, Schumann, Villa-Lobos
Rostropovich, du Pré
ICA Classics © ICAC 5149

Sir Malcolm Sargent at his most inspired

Another memorable festival cello performance from 1962 emanates from the BBC Proms: du Pré's debut there, in the Elgar Concerto with **Sir Malcolm Sargent** conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra. As in the Schumann Concerto (above), Jacqueline du Pré displays many of her cardinal qualities – emotional candour, considerable technical facility, tonal beauty and total identification with the music – but later performances under Barbirolli and Barenboim would find her offering a more comprehensively insightful interpretation. What most impresses me about this performance is the sensitivity, flexibility and dramatic impetus of Sargent's conducting, which are even more compelling than on his studio recording with Tortelier, now on Testament and also coupled with *The Dream of Gerontius* (the version with Heddle Nash and Gladys Ripley). Both Testament and Pristine have done extremely well by that legendary 1945 premiere recording, transfer-wise, but the present release features a 1961 radio broadcast recorded by the BBC transcription service and featuring the same forces of the RLPO and the Huddersfield Choral Society. What I treasure most about Sargent's *Gerontius* is his ability to capture what I might term the 'Elgarian sigh', those gentle, melancholy asides that also fill the symphonies – moments of profoundly private contemplation. Then again, the fallen angels that rage wild in the work's

second part are acted out with demonic force, and although the savage orchestral outburst that precedes the soul's plea to be taken away lacks the requisite tonal depth, the orchestral attack has real edge to it and Richard Lewis's entreaty will break your heart. Marjorie Thomas's Angel is above all sincerely sung; she's highly credible in the role, and phrases with considerable feeling, but the voice isn't quite in the Janet Baker class. Pristine's sound quality is extremely good, and while those averse to the odd cough and audible fidget are duly warned, with music making of this quality I personally wouldn't complain, especially not in the case of Sargent's wonderful *Gerontius*.

THE RECORDING



'Sargent Conducts Elgar'
Cello Concerto.
Dream of Gerontius
du Pré vc BBC SO et al
Pristine Audio © ② PASC525

Ricci in his heyday

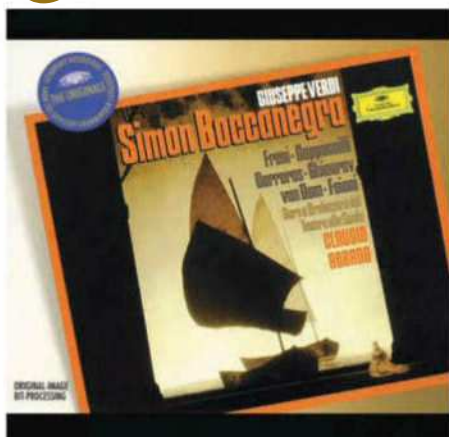
On the violin front, Scribendum's set 'The Art of Ruggiero Ricci' includes some relative rarities such as the numerous genre pieces that he recorded as a prodigiously gifted young man in the late 1930s; Beethoven's String Trio in C minor, Op 9 No 3, with his cellist brother Giorgio Ricci (there were seven musical siblings in the family) and viola player Joseph de Pasquale; and, most interesting, a live Leningrad recital from 1961 with Martha Argerich which includes Beethoven's E flat Violin Sonata, Op 12 No 3, and ends with a dazzling account of Sarasate's *Introduction and Tarantella*. Elsewhere in the set, there's plenty to savour including fine Bach concertos from 1969 and persuasive solo Bach from 1981 (both sets loaned from Unicorn); plus a number of celebrated Decca recordings, such as Beethoven's Violin Concerto under Boult, an expressively voiced stereo set of the complete Paganini Caprices and the two Prokofiev concertos under Ernest Ansermet – the Second being considerably better than the First (where the Scherzo is none too secure). Best of all, though, is Prokofiev's Sonata for two violins with David Nadien, in which both players are on top form. These are good transfers, but as ever with Scribendum there are no annotations. ⑥

THE RECORDING



'The Art of Ruggiero Ricci'
Bach, Beethoven, Paganini,
Prokofiev, Sibelius et al
Ricci vn et al
Scribendum © ⑪ SC812

Classics RECONSIDERED



Hugo Shirley and Richard Fairman revisit Abbado's 1977 La Scala recording of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, only to confirm its classic status



Verdi

Simon Boccanegra

Piero Cappuccilli (Simon Boccanegra); **Mirella Freni** (Maria Boccanegra/Amelia); **Nicolai Ghiaurov** (Jacopo Fiesco); **José Van Dam** (Paolo Albiani); **José Carreras** (Gabriele Adorno) **Chorus & Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Claudio Abbado**
DG

Abbado wholly vindicates Verdi's intentions through his feeling for the shape of a whole scene, for the inherent subtleties of Verdi's scoring and for certain rhythmic effects. He seconds, emphasises Verdi's genius, supported by the orchestra's playing. Cappuccilli's Boccanegra is a reading to equal his conductor's – to set beside Gobbi's

(Santini version) and in some respects excel it. His breath control is extraordinary. Not since Martinelli in his prime on disc have I heard so many Verdian phrases taken in a single span. To this almost faultless technique, he adds a richly authoritative, deeply committed reading of this role, as acute in execution of *parlando* passages as it is tender and moving in the scenes with Amelia. DG also score in their casting of Gabriele. Carreras, although he doesn't seem to have sung the part in the Scala performances, is well integrated into the cast, and his fiery, impassioned singing, like Cappuccilli's, long-phrased and keenly pointed, is wholly in character. He also

sings *piano*; witness the close of the first-act duet with Amelia and that calm passage, marked *sostenuto religioso*, of benediction in Act I. Here Ghiaurov as Fiesco is at his most convincing – he's never less than imposing in his strength of utterance. Freni, a mettlesome Amelia/Maria, is right inside the part and provides much lovely singing but, while she is more secure at the top of her register than Los Angeles, she cannot float her tone so easily. The recording is immediate and full of presence. I shall keep the Santini version, but when I want to hear this opera in a memorable all-round interpretation, I'll turn to this set. **Alan Blyth, 11/77**

Richard Fairman For anybody with a long memory, this 1977 *Simon Boccanegra* is more than just a classic recording. It had its origins in the 1971 La Scala production directed by Giorgio Strehler and that was a classic in its own right. La Scala took it on tour so many times, to New York, London, Paris, Tokyo and beyond. I wish we were talking about a DVD of it, but amazingly there doesn't seem to be any commercial version on sale.

Hugo Shirley Yes, those of us with shorter memories shouldn't forget that broader context, and I wish I'd been able to see the staging properly. But in some ways it's maybe best that the production, for those lucky (and, dare I say, old) enough to have seen it, can live on in the mind's eye rather than on a video that by now, nearly five decades later, would probably seem very grainy and low-tech. The audio-only set, which still sounds so fresh, certainly couldn't be accused of such an issue.

RF Needless to say, you can find an Italian TV relay from La Scala in 1978 on YouTube. It is grainy, yes, but the grand,

Italian post-war style, of which that was one of the best and last examples, is there for all to see – the classically clean lines, the panoramic sets, the beautiful symbolism of the ships. Sorry, too many memories!

HS Yes, save them for your autobiography! It's maybe interesting, though, that for me, coming from a vintage that post-dates the staging, this recording has always primarily existed as just that. I think it even took me quite a long time to twig that the cover image – such a painterly tableau – came from a staged production. One can obviously hear that the recording itself is deeply informed by the theatre, but for me it's also one of those rare opera recordings that manages to marry drama with something close to flawlessness – 'perfection' is rarely desirable, I'd say, least of all in Verdi.

RF Hearing it afresh after many years, I found that what struck me most of all was how everything is so stylish and musically correct, the epitome of luxuriously high-quality Verdi singing

and playing. I can almost hear Abbado giving the singers notes as I listen.

HS Yes. I was playing some of Abbado's later studio Verdi recently, where the seriousness and meticulousness occasionally seem to dampen the fire. Here, though, there's all the fire one wants, and that seriousness really comes into its own. I often find myself listening just to the Prologue, where it's so difficult to imagine the colouring and the pacing ever being surpassed.

RF I couldn't agree more. The richness of sound Abbado finds in those opening pages, where Verdi sinks into a deep E major wholly new in his vocabulary, is mesmerising. And it comes again and again – the yearning reach of the violins as Boccanegra goes to find the body of Maria in the Prologue, and the wave of deep emotion later that Verdi found in his 1881 revision for the moment when Boccanegra recognises Amelia as his long-lost daughter.

HS There's the basic fact, too, that, for an opera that's really not about stardom



Claudio Abbado finds 'a richness of sound' in the opening pages of Verdi's score that is 'mesmerising'

(or that shouldn't be, in my view), you've got a cast of stars in their absolute prime. But there's no prima donna behaviour, no one who doesn't feel totally committed to Abbado's – and Verdi's – vision.

RF The consistency of style is at the highest level, perhaps because this production ran, albeit with changes of cast, for so many performances. Once the singers knew the Verdi style that Abbado wanted, it must have seeped into them until they all had it in their bones.

HS And has the La Scala orchestra ever sounded better?

RF I can hardly believe it *is* them. Oh, sorry – I didn't mean that to sound like a put-down! But the tonal richness of their playing is almost worthy of a Karajan recording of the same vintage.

HS And it's maybe worth going back to the cast, and the Prologue in particular, where you've got this triumvirate of Piero Cappuccilli, Nicolai Ghiaurov and José Van Dam. Cappuccilli is a paragon of long-breathed Verdian style. Ghiaurov rolls out big, melancholic phrases in 'Il lacerato spirito' – an almost unbearably noble and moving account of that

wonderful aria. And the young Van Dam is impeccable as Paolo.

RF Grand, legato singing was always Cappuccilli's strength, together with the size of his voice, but the care he takes to shape every line here is surely him at his best. By contrast, Tito Gobbi – in the unvarnished immediacy of the Gabriele Santini recording (made in 1957) – sounds cavalier, though the character is vividly three-dimensional. Both he and, more recently, Paolo Gavanelli, play *Boccanegra* patently as a lower-class man of the people. Cappuccilli makes him sound like the aristocrat in this story.

HS And do you like Ghiaurov as much as I do?

RF I am surprised his voice doesn't sound bigger, given the majesty of it in the theatre, but the depth of timbre and his highly expressive way of shaping a vocal line paint Fiesco as a very human character. He's an alternative to the unique and implacable Boris Christoff.

HS And we haven't even mentioned the two additional cherries we get on the cake when we arrive at the opera proper: Mirella Freni floating in beautifully in her opening aria, joined by a thrillingly fresh-voiced

José Carreras. I fear we're getting a bit boring here, though; all this positivity risks getting us thrown out of the Critics' Circle!

RF I do have a reservation about Freni. My memory of her Amelia in this production in London is that it was the best I'd heard from her in a live performance, but here I find the voice has a sharp edge. Of course, the instinctive Italian style she brings to the role is an important makeweight. As to Carreras, I can't think of a finer recording of him, what with all the inimitable passion and spontaneity, matched by a voice in peak condition. There is no hint of the strain to come later.

HS Yes, returning to the set, I found Freni not quite as mellifluous as I remembered her being, but she's still pretty wonderful – and certainly a very long way from letting the side down. I wonder, though: do you think the arrival of this recording (and the Strehler production) changed the way that people saw the opera more generally at all?

RF I think that is pitching claims for it a bit high. The Metropolitan Opera and Royal Opera archives show that prior to 1977 *Simon Boccanegra* was, if not a repertoire standard, at least a fairly regular visitor every few years. And, of course, all of Verdi's operas were carried on a rising tide of popularity in the post-war era. I think it would be more true to say that this recording emphasised the opera's standing as a music drama of great consistency and richness, rather than a showcase for a star baritone and bass.

HS It's certainly a work that's taken seriously as a dark masterpiece, even if in recent times it has become a showcase for one particular star who's not quite baritone!

RF Unlike some people, I recall quite enjoying that not-quite-baritone in the role! As for this recording, it has been a huge pleasure to be reacquainted with it – both for its own consummate musicality, and as a memento of what was, despite some different singers, one of my great nights at the opera.

HS More than 40 years on, it's still irresistibly fresh and compelling. Other versions of the opera are available, of course, and you've already mentioned the Santini, with Gobbi and Christoff. But we seem here only to have underlined how the classic status of the Abbado feels as secure as it's ever been. **G**

Books



Mike Ashman reads a new biography of Ernest Newman:

'I would have loved a glimpse at how Newman struggled on with his Wagner project when so many sources were literally behind enemy lines'



Richard Stokes delves into a treasure trove of French song:

'Resick discusses a representative selection of songs with elegance, insight, enthusiasm and a total lack of jargon'

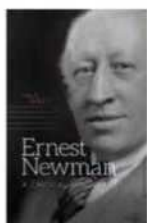
Ernest Newman

A Critical Biography

By Paul Watt

Boydell Press, HB, 274pp, £45

ISBN 978-1-7832-7190-0



No obvious anniversary stands out – nor have any exceptional iconoclastic statues been erected – but

two of Britain's 20th-century literary music critics are the subjects of new biographies this year. Neville Cardus (by Christopher O'Brien, published by Whitethorn) and Ernest Newman (details above) had much in common. They were both (in musical terms) largely self-taught Northerners of working-class background who changed the names they were born with (Newman's was William Roberts) and secured prestigious positions writing for national and London newspapers. Both had serious outside interests (Cardus cricket, Newman freethought philosophy) which threatened to take them away from music – yet both completed major book-length studies in addition to their regular journalistic duties. And both maintained strong friendships with leading practitioners of music and of other professions – Sir Thomas Beecham (with both men), Sir Donald Bradman, philosopher/scholar John M Robertson and Walter Legge and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf included.

Watt tells us in an introduction that two previous biographical attempts – by Henry George Farmer, a musicologist and Arabist, and Vera Newman, the critic's second wife – 'help position the slant' he has chosen to give his own book. His predecessors' work was sharply divided: Farmer covered only up to 1899 and concentrated on Newman's work for the freethought press and his literary criticism (his main musical work had hardly begun by then); Mrs Newman covered only from 1914 onwards and concentrated on music (although much of her book is a rather cute

domestic journal of holidays, travels, illnesses and cats). Watt certainly provides a better balance between Newman's two intellectual careers, although his focus on his subject's reading and writing excludes basic facts about working life off the page almost as totally as Mrs Newman's account – and you'll need to keep in touch with the chronology the book provides.

In his attempt to correct and broaden the Wagner-centric image that we still have of Newman, Watt's text laughs at the start of its opening chapter with the anonymous clerihew 'Ernest Newman said / "next week, Schumann" / But, when next week came / It was Wagner just the same'. But the overall result is of some imbalance. Perhaps it's fair enough that the Gibbonesque four volumes of *The Life of Richard Wagner* (published between 1933 and 1946 but in preparation long before) are not as central to Watt's study as they may well still be to British and American readers of a certain age. Certainly it leaves valuable space for consideration of Newman's first major biographical study, *Gluck and the Opera: A Study in Musical History* (1895), a challenging subject for a book at a time when only a single work (*recte* one piece of music) by this composer was widely known outside Europe; and for examining the near-scandal of *The Man Liszt: A study of the tragi-comedy of a soul divided against itself* (1934), where Newman's bluntly stated disapproval of Liszt's private life distorted any scholarly image he achieved of the musician as a whole.

Yet if the selection of material on which to concentrate is unpredictably refreshing – a special bonus if you still recall some of Newman's actual prose – there are other gaps which make this study less valuable than it might have been. Watt's central interest is undoubtedly methodology – he's interested in the 'how' and 'why' of this writer's achievements on the page. Newman clearly was too – to the extent of introducing many of his books with diatribes on method, his own, plus attacks on those of other scholars. And that's not always a compelling read from either

biographer or subject. When we do get finally to the four-volume *The Life of Richard Wagner* I for one would love to have had even a brief glimpse at, for example, how Newman struggled on with a project where so many of his sources (and he was the first, in English, to use many of them) were now, in wartime, literally behind enemy lines and his subject itself highly disapproved of. Or of how frankly dodgy is much of Newman's material on Nietzsche – we can be kind and call it dated but at 75-plus years' gap we need to know more. So that's another book, or article, or annotated edition – but I hope someone will write it.

Watt has done a very great amount of reading and put those results creditably at our disposal. Perhaps more 'catalogue raisonné' than biography per se, his new volume is, on the whole, carefully edited and practically laid out – the restriction of the Newman articles and books to those 'cited in the text' is frustrating but perhaps inevitable. It is certainly full of leads and information for further study of Newman's work – I could wish, however, that more actual Newman was quoted in it at greater length. As Neville Cardus wrote: 'Ernest Newman was perhaps the first writer to truly Europeanise our music and our humane response to music.' **Mike Ashman**

French Vocal Literature

Repertoire in Context

By Georgine Resick

Rowman & Littlefield, PB, 342pp, £31.95

ISBN 978-1-4422-5844-0



This remarkable book covers the history of French song from the 12th century troubadors to Pierre Boulez and the contemporary vocal repertoire. Discussion is limited, in the main, to works for solo voice with piano, organ or instrumental accompaniment, while opera is only considered on those occasions when



the songs of Saint-Saëns, Lalo and Fauré; chapter 8 describes the influence of Wagner on French musical life, especially the songs of Franck, Duparc, Chausson and d'Indy; chapter 9, 'The Belle Époque I', concentrates on the songs of Chabrier, Satie and Hahn. With chapter 10 we reach the 20th century and the 'Impressionists' Debussy and Ravel. Chapter 11 discusses the impact of the First World War on French life and the music of Debussy, Fauré, Nadia Boulanger, Koechlin, Caplet, Roussel and Ibert. Chapter 12 is called 'Les Années folles: Cocteau, Satie and Les Six (1918-1930)' and explores the songs of Tailleferre, Durey, Auric, Honegger, Milhaud and Poulenc. Chapter Thirteen, 'The Mystical Mélodie and Neoromanticism (1914-1945)' takes us up to the end of the Second World War, with analyses of the songs of Lili Boulanger, Jean Cras, Messiaen, Jolivet and the late mélodies of Poulenc. Resick's wide-ranging volume ends with a discussion of the vocal music

The writings of Ernest Newman – best known for his four-volume study of Wagner – are central to a new biography

its development played an important part in musical evolution. The range is vast. Georgine Resick begins with a chapter that traces the development of French poetry and song from the 12th to the 16th centuries, from the Troubadors via Guillaume de Machaut and Jean Richafort to Nicolas de La Grotte and Claude Le Jeune; chapter 2 is called 'The Turbulent Century and the *air de cour* (1576-1661)' and introduces us to the 200 *airs* of Pierre Guéron, Etienne Moulinié and Gabriel Bataille's arrangements of polyphonic *airs* for voice and lute; chapter 3 focuses on the *Grand Siècle* and the birth of French opera, in relation to Lully, Molière and Charpentier; chapter 4 is titled 'Life after Lully', with sections on Campra, Couperin (*Trois Leçons de Ténèbres*), Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and the cantatas of Jacquet de la Guerre, Rameau and Clérambault. The next chapter, 'Enlightenment, Revolution and Empire (1750-1815)', deals with the Opera Wars and the conflicting aims of Lully, Rameau,

Gluck and Piccinni. It introduces the reader to the 18th-century pastoral song genres that led to the Romance – musically simple settings of sentimental pastoral poetry such as Jean-Paul Martini's 'Plaisir d'amour' – and discusses the songs and music of the Revolutionary years, with particular reference to Méhul and Cherubini.

Chapter 5, 'Romance to Mélodie', considers the gradual rise of the *mélodie* from Hippolyte Monpou, Félicien David and Pauline Viardot to the songs of Hector Berlioz – a development that owed much to the influence of the German Lied and the poetry of such Romantic figures as Lamartine, Hugo, de Musset and Gautier; the chapter closes with a discussion of the French songs of Liszt and Wagner. Chapter 6, 'Middle-Class Mélodie (1848-1870)' is devoted to the songs of Gounod, Bizet and the *poèmes* of Massenet – the song-cycles inspired by the example of Schumann. Chapter 7, 'The Mélodie as Chamber Music (1870-1880)' examines

of Varèse, Xenakis, Dutilleux and a number of lesser-known contemporary composers.

Each chapter of this hugely intelligent book discusses the song repertoire against the political and social background of each period, and often refers tangentially to other artistic disciplines such as poetry, painting and dance. Such a holistic approach might imply a perfunctory discussion of the actual songs – not a bit of it. When dealing with each composer, Resick cleverly decides on a representative selection of songs to discuss, and then does so with elegance, insight, enthusiasm and a total lack of jargon. A refreshing aspect of this volume is the way in which the author discusses language as much as music – indeed, the Prologue is devoted to the importance of French prosody. *French Vocal Literature* is a treasure trove. It will inspire recitalists to explore neglected gems and encourage them to immerse themselves in the social, historical and literary background of the songs they choose to perform. **Richard Stokes**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No 1 in G minor, Op 25

Crucial to a worthy recording of this most uplifting of minor-key concertos, says **Jeremy Nicholas**, are sparkling detail, a deeply felt slow movement and following the composer's markings to the letter

Usually for this section of the magazine, I should like to start by mentioning one of my top choices. It is a performance that made me look anew at this old warhorse. The performance in question is by Yuja Wang on a DVD that I've had in my collection for several years, not because of the concerto but because of the work that precedes it: Mendelssohn's forgotten Piano Sextet in D, Op 110. For some reason I had not bothered to play the concerto (like the sextet, a live performance from the Verbier Festival), but last year I stumbled across it online.

Among the many appreciative comments on YouTube – mostly confined to 'Awesome!!', 'Wow!', 'Incredible!!' – were these: 'All my life stresses suddenly don't seem to matter so much, knowing that this incredible music and performance exist in the world'; 'This performance moves me so, and all that is evil in the world is forgotten.' There are many other similar reactions posted – with which, not incidentally, I concur – as well as this observation, which, as we shall see, is rather pertinent: 'Every note is super clear! That's the difficulty of this piece.' Indeed it is.

The Mendelssohn G minor was one of the first piano concertos I got to know, having listened to it obsessively in my early teens in the famous recording by Serkin and Ormandy. It has rather fallen out of favour in recent years as can be seen from the fact that between 1900 and 1949 it was played on no less than 25 occasions at the BBC Proms, while between 1950 and 2017 it featured only eight times (with another one to come at the Proms this month).

YOUNG, BUT BY NO MEANS FLEDGLING

Mendelssohn was just 22 when he wrote the concerto in 1831; and it was 22 years since Beethoven had composed the *Emperor* Concerto. With the exception of Chopin's two concertos (1829 and 1830), few other works of the genre written during those 22 years have remained in the standard repertoire. Mendelssohn's Op 25 may be the most light-shod of these four but it is, arguably, also the most experimental, calling on works such as Spohr's *Gesangsszene* Violin Concerto (1816) and Weber's *Konzertstück* (1821) in contracting three movements into one. It dispenses with a long orchestral exposition; it uses fanfares between movements effectively to bind them together; unlike contemporaneous concertos by, say, Kalkbrenner or Herz, it largely eschews virtuoso self-display (though the pianist certainly needs a bravura technique to bring it off successfully); and there is no opportunity for a showy cadenza. Above all, there is that most precious of all ingredients radiating throughout the concerto: a succession of glorious, memorable melodies.

Even at 22, Mendelssohn was no novice in the field, having composed three earlier piano concertos: one in A minor for piano and strings and two (in E major and A flat) for two pianos and orchestra. The G minor, however, is designated No 1 – 'a thing quickly thrown off', as he described it to his father – and was written for and dedicated to the piano prodigy and Kalkbrenner pupil Delphine von Schauroth (1814-87).

The first movement, *Molto allegro con fuoco*, opens with seven crescendo bars preparing the piano's forceful octave entry and leading

to the first main theme. A lyrical second subject follows, but the whole relatively brief movement is dominated by bustling activity, culminating in six thrilling bars with both hands scurrying about in unison two octaves apart. Shortly afterwards, with a fanfare of trumpets and horns, Mendelssohn cleverly makes the transition to the E major *Andante*, a romanza-like second movement that continues without pause. The main theme has often been compared to some of the gentler songs without words (Mendelssohn was assembling the first set at the time), and its accompaniment is deftly executed, violas and divided cellos being the principal singers (even the violins do not re-enter till near the end). Trumpets and horns interrupt with their earlier fanfare, linking to the third movement at an initial *Presto* marking. Enter the soloist with some introductory bravura gestures that lead to the main subject (*Molto allegro e vivace*) and the finale proper, which is, in the words of one commentator (Abraham Veinus, 1948), 'thoroughly unconcerned with anything other than brilliant virtuoso entertainment' – except that towards the end Mendelssohn unexpectedly inserts two themes from the first movement, a cyclic device that helps bind the whole of this concerto together.

A VERY GOOD PLACE TO START

Any survey of the discography of Op 25 must begin with **Rudolf Serkin** and his celebrated recording from 1960 with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra. It stands up remarkably well: the playing is light-hearted without being frivolous, dextrous without being glib, and



PHOTOGRAPHY: WORLD HISTORY ARCHIVE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The young Mendelssohn by Fanny Mendelssohn's husband, artist Wilhelm Hensel (1794-1861); the composer was 22 when he wrote the concerto



The 1960 recording by Serkin, Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra 'stands up remarkably well'

the piano is slightly forward in the sound picture so that all the brilliance of the solo part is captured in detail at its sparkling best. True, the sound quality is now a little elderly, the brass have an acidic edge in the finale, but these matters pale into insignificance in the face of such exhilarating music-making. Although Mendelssohn marked the first movement 'very fast and fiery', an extraordinary number of soloists and conductors opt for a comfortable *allegro vivace* and forget the *con fuoco*. Serkin and Ormandy do not, however, and open with blistering energy. So do **Yuja Wang** and Kurt Masur. Within a few bars of their 2009 recording, you know you are in for a white-knuckle ride – with small details that are not evident on the Serkin recording: the horns in the opening *tutti* at bars 6 and 7, and the soloist's dotted 'horn call' in the left hand (bars 16 and 17). Wang is on fire. Not so the Verbier players around the 1'40" mark, where they lag behind Wang despite Masur's best efforts. His shout of

encouragement puts them back on track. After the invigorating first movement, Wang shows what great lyrical beauty and tone she can bring to her playing when needed – it's deeply felt and sympathetically partnered. And as for her finale, I doubt if I shall hear a more thrilling execution of what amounts to a toccata solo from bar 71 till the *tutti* restatement of the main theme at bar 131, the semiquavers cascading from her hands with as clear delineation as the left-hand quavers, all contributing to a life-enhancing festive air of carefree *joie de vivre*.

The first complete recording of Mendelssohn's G minor Concerto, I am now fairly certain, was made by the Royal Symphony Orchestra, the conductor Joseph Batten and the short-lived Welsh pianist Marie Novello (she died from throat cancer exactly 90 years ago in June 1928 aged just 30). Long ago, I picked up the final disc of the set in a junk shop. I seem to remember it was remarkably fluent, otherwise I can only recall the green Edison Bell Velvet

Face label. The disc number was 642, which means it was made in 1924 (nla – it gets a brief mention 10/25). Was it a coincidence that the second recording of the work was made only a few months later (on January 27, 1925) for the more prestigious HMV label by **Benno Moiseiwitsch** and Sir Landon Ronald conducting the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra? Though much orchestral detail is lost in the acoustic surface swish, the youthful high spirits of the work are captured to perfection. And listen to how in the finale they differentiate between the 39 introductory *Presto* bars and the change to *Molto allegro e vivace*. It is, admittedly, a bit of a gabble – though not as much of a gabble as **Cyprien Katsaris** and Masur in their 1987 recording. After two movements of refined classical poise, Katsaris takes the finale at a speed that beats all comers, frantically scampering home in 5'44". Moiseiwitsch at least manages to retain a degree of musicality. He also does what the music cries out for (but is not in the score) and joins the orchestra for the final four bars.

Jesús María Sanromá, the Boston Pops Orchestra and Arthur Fiedler were next (June 29, 1938; Victor – nla, but currently available on YouTube) – still among the most spirited and individual accounts, but suffering from several splashy moments and, in the finale, indistinct right-hand passagework against the all too audible um-cha of the left. This was followed by the first of two versions by **Ania Dorfmann** dating from November 1, 1938. Dorfmann (1899-1984), remembered as the first female soloist ever engaged by Toscanini and for her recording with him of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 1, is clearly an underrated figure. Her Abbey Road account sparkles with character and confidence, has one of the swiftest slow movements (5'09") – big paragraphs, lovely singing tone – and only falls down in the overfast finale (5'42"). She too joins the orchestra in the last bars. Her 1953 recording for RCA with the Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia and Erich Leinsdorf is not dissimilar: another fleet slow movement (at 5'27" it's over a minute faster than Wang, for

BEST PERFORMANCE ON FILM

Wang *pf* **Verbier Fest Orch** / **Masur**

Idéale Audience Intl © **DVD** 307 9248

No competition: **Yuja Wang** live in Verbier vies for the top spot despite that accompaniment glitch in the first movement. Only a handful of pianists bring the same level of clarity, athleticism and sheer daredevil fun to Mendelssohn's score.



TOP CHOICE ALTERNATIVE

Hough *pf* **CBSO** / **Foster**

Hyperion © CDA66969

If the Thibaudet is too brash for you, then Stephen Hough's refined, musically perceptive account is, by some way, the other best modern recording to capture the essence of Op 25. The four other Mendelssohn works for piano and orchestra are a bonus.



BEST HISTORICAL

Lympny *pf* **Philh** / **Kubelik**

APR mono © ② APR6011

Every collection should have the 1960 Serkin recording, but the version that captured my heart was this from 1948. Faced with a choice between it and Joyce, the 1951 *Record Guide* on balance found Lympny's performance 'certainly more alluring'.



example), followed by a bold and exciting finale, though not all the semiquavers are cleanly articulated and woodwind detail is minimal. Nevertheless, this is a treasurable performance with a distinct personality.

In welcoming the superb Decca Eloquence box-set of **Eileen Joyce's** complete studio recordings (2/18), I made special mention of the Mendelssohn Op 25 recorded on September 5, 1947, with Anatole Fistoulari and the LSO in Kingsway Hall. I wrote that it is 'music that suits her particular gifts to perfection. Lightly pedalled, the outer movements are like sparkling champagne, yet has there ever been a more touching account of the slow movement?' I would add that this last is achieved by adopting a fastish *andante* (she pushes on in the middle section) and eschewing any sentimentality.

The Mendelssohn G minor was the concerto played by **Dame Moura Lympny** at her debut aged 12. A mere 13 months after Joyce, she made the first of her two currently available recordings of it – for HMV with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Rafael Kubelík. While it is one of the fastest performances on disc – a mere 18'23" overall – it never seems rushed or unduly speedy. Lympny simply revels in the youthful energy of the score. Her phrasing and articulation throughout are immaculate. What fun she and Kubelík (providing outstanding support) seem to be having with the music. Her 1964 account with the RPO under Sir Malcolm Sargent, made for Reader's Digest, is a version to admire without being outstanding, technically superb from Lympny but curiously unengaged. There is a most awkward moment with the solo oboe in the first movement at 4'40".

VERSIONS YOU CAN LIVE WITHOUT

György Cziffra Jnr conducts the workaday Monte Carlo National Opera Orchestra in a 1978 recording (EMI – nla, but currently available on YouTube) that opens promisingly, only for his father to take the wind out of his sails by opting for two heavyweight opening chords before scuttling back in tempo. Many pianists do this. I can understand why – but it is not what Mendelssohn wrote nor, I believe, what he intended, which is that the left-right-left-right dominant *tutti* chords from the orchestra should be followed *tempo giusto* by the piano. It being Cziffra, there are, or course, many delectable individual touches like the *pp* scales in sixths (first movement, bars 134-7) played *staccato e leggiero*, but this is not a comfortable version to live with.

Nor is the one offered by **John Ogdon** in 1969 with the LSO under Aldo Ceccato. In



Hough: 'refined and musically perceptive'

this disappointingly unimaginative version, the first-movement unison octaves should have had a retake, the slow movement often sounds like Brahms, and if Mendelssohn wrote 16 semiquavers per bar in the fast passagework of the finale, then you could have fooled me. I found the great **Peter Katin** in 1956, too, underwhelming, with a first movement well under *molto allegro* and the last somewhat below *presto*. The piano is disconcertingly separated from the orchestra. Fast forward to 1993, and **Benjamin Frith**, a seasoned Mendelssohnian whose

recordings of the composer I have much enjoyed, surprisingly interprets *con fuoco* as angry and petulant (around the 5'00" mark he is distinctly heavy-handed). The first movement at 7'41" is long, as is the finale (6'55"). In the same year, **Howard Shelley**, another adept in this repertoire, offers a faithful, well-observed reading as soloist with a somewhat generalised accompaniment. More deliberate and less exuberant than either Serkin or Wang, for once he fails to set the pulse racing. Neither **Lang Lang** nor Barenboim have anything special to say about the music in their 2003 recording, and although it is a highly professional studio job, I found the Chinese superstar's approach uncharacteristically restrained. The semiquaver pages in the finale might have sounded clearly articulated on the day, but they have not turned out that way on my speakers.

Two no-longer-available recordings that fall by the wayside for acoustical reasons are by Joseph Kalichstein and Justus Frantz. I first encountered Kalichstein's 1970 account (RCA Red Seal, 4/72; vinyl only – nla) in a Time Life box-set. Although welcomed by Trevor Harvey in these pages and conducted by André Previn with the LSO, it never enraptured me – not because of the performance (which has a lot going for it) but because of the distant sound focus. It held me (and still does) at arm's length. Detail and orchestral punch were at a premium. Returning to it for this survey, I find that Kalichstein misreads/misplays the first-beat chord in bar 19. The Frantz, with the RPO and Yehudi Menuhin (Big Ben

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1925	Moiseiwitsch Royal Albert Hall Orchestra / Ronald	Naxos Ⓢ 8 111116
1938	Dorfmann LSO / W Goehr	Dutton Ⓢ CDBP9781
1947	Joyce LSO / Fistoulari	Decca Eloquence Ⓢ 10 ELQ482 6291 (7/98*, 2/18)
1948	Lympny Philh Orch / Kubelík	APR Ⓢ 2 APR6011 (A/13); Documents Ⓢ 10 600403
1953	Dorfmann Robin Hood Dell Orch, Philadelphia / Leinsdorf	RCA Ⓢ 9 88985 39010-2 (2/54*)
1956	Katin LSO / Collins	Archipel Ⓢ ARPCD0203
1960	Serkin Philadelphia Orchestra / Ormandy	Alto Ⓢ ALC1319; Documents Ⓢ 10 233478 (3/61*)
1964	Lympny RPO / Sargent	Ivory Classics Ⓢ IC70906 (6/00)
1969	Ogdon LSO / Ceccato	Testament Ⓢ SBT1288 (7/70*)
1974	Perahia ASMF / Marriner	Sony Classical Ⓢ 15 88985 41670-2; Ⓢ 10 88875 18339-2 (7/75*)
1978	J Johnson RPO / Freeman	Centaur Ⓢ CRC3354
1982	A Schiff Bavarian RSO / Dutoit	Decca Ⓢ 466 425-2DM (4/00)
1987	Katsaris Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Masur	Apex Ⓢ 8573 89088-2
1993	Frith Slovak State PO, Košice / Stankovsky	Naxos Ⓢ 8 550681 (4/94)
1993	Shelley London Mozart Players	Chandos Ⓢ CHAN9215
1997	Hough CBSO / Foster	Hyperion Ⓢ CDA66969 (9/97)
2001	Thibaudet Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Blomstedt	Decca Ⓢ 468 600-2DH (A/01)
2003	Lang Lang Chicago SO / Barenboim	DG Ⓢ 474 291-2GH (9/03); Ⓢ 9 479 7447
2009	Wang Verbier Festival Orchestra / Masur	Idéale Audience Intl Ⓢ DVD 307 9248; Ⓢ 5 DVD 307 9078; EuroArts Ⓢ 5 DVD 205 0538
2011	Marshev South Denmark PO / Porcelijn	Danacord Ⓢ DACOCD734/6 (A/14)
2013	Schnyder Musikkollegium Winterthur / Boyd	RCA Ⓢ 88875 05645-2

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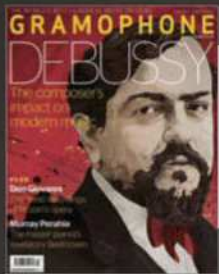
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Yuja Wang: 'athleticism and sheer daredevil fun'



Top Thibaudet: 'takes Mendelssohn at his word'

Phonogram Co – nla), was recorded in 1986 in what appears to be an empty aircraft hangar. He is another of those who drags the tempo down with his two opening magisterial octave Ds, a gesture repeated whenever they reappear. Some of his semiquaver passagework is very approximate.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Also with the RPO, but eight years earlier (1978) comes a notably better recording and performance thanks to the conducting of Paul Freeman and his soloist

James Johnson. Woodwind and string detail are notable attributes, but although Johnson is not short of *fuoco*, his pedalling is overgenerous. Everything is neatly in its place, well observed – and rather too studio-bound.

Sir András Schiff's 1982 version with Charles Dutoit also has much to recommend it, the sound quality and recorded balance not least among its merits. Dutoit's superbly alert and collegial support is complemented by Schiff's delightfully light-fingered dispatch of the outer movements. *Molto allegro*? – yes. *Con fuoco*? – not so much. *Leggiero*? – maybe a little too daintily so.

The Swiss pianist **Oliver Schnyder** (2013) benefits from a piano-orchestra balance that is well-nigh perfect, with the strings and woodwinds of the Musikkollegium Winterthur beautifully captured. It is a version I like very much, as elegant and refined from the soloist as it is from the conductor, Douglas Boyd. In the fourth

and fifth bars from the end, they insert two unwritten hairpins that are rather effective.

If you want the convenience of all of Mendelssohn's works for piano and orchestra (including Marcello Bufalini's completion of Piano Concerto No 3) in one four-CD set, then go for **Oleg Marshev** with the South Denmark Philharmonic under David Porcelijn in 2011. True, the sound picture in Op 25 is too 'empty concert hall' for my taste, but the ear soon adjusts. The spirited performance is worth hearing for the last movement alone where Marshev's left hand pumps out a gleeful um-cha um-cha with exemplary clarity underneath the glittering semiquavers.

And so to the much-vaunted version by **Murray Perahia** and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields directed by Sir Neville Marriner in 1974 on Sony. You cannot but admire Perahia's scintillating delivery of the outer movements and the spacious dreamy quality he brings to the slow movement. Marriner's accompaniment, too, is first-rate. My quarrel is with the sound – not just the rather fuzzy string tone, nor the over-reverberant timpani in the first movement, but rather the placement of the piano. The finale especially suffers from the dominance of subsidiary material at the expense of the soloist. Much as I love the spirit of the playing, these aspects militate against its complete success.

HEAD-TO-HEAD FOR THE TOP SPOT

Not for the first time in a *Gramophone* Collection, a recording by **Stephen Hough**

(1997) finds itself in contention for the top spot. Here is a pianist who combines intellect with innate musicality, and supreme technical ability with refined taste. The attention that he and Lawrence Foster pay to the scrupulous observation of Mendelssohn's score is equalled by few others, but these details are subsumed into performances of urgent and purposeful spontaneity. One could argue that Hough makes a little too much of the solo episode in the finale at 3'33" *et seq.* (marked *tranquillo* – not *ritardando*) and later when Mendelssohn returns us to the second subject of the first movement. On both occasions, tension and momentum almost evaporate. The recorded sound (Tony Faulkner in Dudley Town Hall) is Hyperion at its notable best. Does it thrill? Does it move you? Does it capture the spirit of the concerto? Yes – on all counts. But not as much as **Jean-Yves Thibaudet** with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under Herbert Blomstedt four years later. When Mendelssohn says *con fuoco* for the opening movement, he means it – not '*con fuoco* whenever you feel it's appropriate'. The first piano entry is *ff* reinforced by stabbing staccato octaves; the *con fuoco* instruction is repeated in bar 18. And so on. Thibaudet takes the composer at his word. The first movement's second subject is marked *tranquillo* followed shortly thereafter by two bars of *ritardando* before a return to tempo, instructions which the majority of pianists in this survey simply ignore and go their own expressive way. Not Thibaudet. In the slow movement, he is one of those to take an expansive view of *andante* (coincidentally, two of the speediest pianists in the first movement – Serkin and Wang – do the same) with some unusually expressive playing. An animated fanfare sets the scene for the finale. The variety of tone and touch Thibaudet displays in this movement is quite masterly, the energy never flagging and the effervescent showers of semiquavers delivered with a joyous rhythmic precision. Altogether, it is a breathlessly exciting end to this most uplifting of minor key piano concertos. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Thibaudet *pf* Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / Blomstedt

Decca © 468 600-2DH

Boisterous and playful, Thibaudet is at times on



the rampage, at others tenderly caressing his latest flame, a devil-may-care buccaneer. Blomstedt is with him all the way, and the piano ideally balanced in the mix.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream where you want, when you want

National Theatre, Munich & live on staatsoper.tv

Wayne McGregor Portrait, June 23

There's an interesting mix of contemporary composers being danced to by Bavarian State Ballet in this new production presenting a trio of ballets from the British choreographer Wayne McGregor. *Kairos* features the music of Max Richter, then it's Kaija Saariaho for *Sunyata*, before *Borderlands* is danced to a joint work by Joel Cadbury and Paul Stoney. It's a British conductor directing the Bavarian State Orchestra too, in the form of Geoffrey Paterson.

staatsoper.de

Barbican, London & online

Gianandrea Noseda conducts Shostakovich, June 24

This all-Shostakovich menu from the London Symphony Orchestra is looking like a cracker, so no wonder they're offering it as a live stream on their YouTube channel. Under the baton of their Principal Guest Conductor, Gianandrea Noseda, Shostakovich's Symphony No 10 is preceded by his Violin Concerto with soloist Nicola Benedetti; and if you want a flavour of the electrifying strength and technical prowess with which she delivers

this work then just go and listen to her 2016 recording of it for Decca.

barbican.org.uk, youtube.com/user/Lso, facebook.com/londonsymphonyorchestra/

Konzerthaus, Vienna & Takt1

Teodor Currentzis conducts Mahler, June 28 in concert, streamed June 29

Streamed by the German specialist classical streaming service Takt1, this isn't going to be any old Mahler performance if the line-up's anything to go by. Firstly because Greek-Russian Currentzis has a wild conducting style which makes for riveting viewing, but also because the orchestra is the ultra-versatile period-instrument ensemble he founded in 2004 and with whom he records for Sony Classical, MusicAeterna. The programme opens with a selection from *Das Knaben Wunderhorn* with the soprano soloist Anna Lucia Richter. She then stays with Currentzis and the orchestra for Symphony No 4 with its 'Das himmlische Leben' *Wunderhorn* song in the finale.

konzerthaus.at, takt1.com

Riverside Square, Bedford

The Philharmonia Orchestra's Virtual Orchestra on tour, July 2 – August 10

Those who remember the Philharmonia Orchestra's pilot Virtual Orchestra project in 2016 at London's Southbank, but couldn't get to London themselves, will be happy to know that thanks to three major Foundation grants the orchestra is taking on four UK residencies which will accompany the digital offering with live performances. These begin with Bedford, and will continue with Leicester in October, followed in 2019 by Canterbury and Basingstoke. The project consists of a 37-screen walk-through digital installation featuring Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting Holst's *The Planets*, a virtual-reality experience of sitting within the orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall as it performs Sibelius's Symphony No 5, as well as school-, family- and community-workshops, a fringe programme and a culminating live concert. We were blown away by the London pilot – and this is very much one for adults as well as children – so we can't recommend it highly enough.

philharmonia.co.uk/the_virtual_orchestra

The Old Divinity School, St John's College, Cambridge & BBC Radio 3

Songs Before Sleep, July 8

A chance to hear some emerging talent, 'Songs before Sleep' is one of the highlights of

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

Donizetti's *La Favorite* from Florence with Fabio Luisi a reliable presence in the pit

Donizetti

Like the proverbial London bus *La Favorite* comes either not at all or in a group. In recent years no fewer than three productions of the superior original French version have been made available for the small screen. It's bad luck on OperaVision that its takeover of the shared Florence Maggio production enshrines a blander, more stand-and-deliver effort dramatically than recent DVDs from Munich and Toulouse. Here we get space-filling large walls, modern haircuts and beards and mock-medieval costume adjusted for comfort.



Yet, if you're seeking a handy – and free – way of getting to know Donizetti's seminal 1840 influence on later Verdi, don't hang back. This is French Grand Opera at Italian speed with hotter Italian

passion. Fabio Luisi has everything well organised in the pit but could have enjoyed the score's dark Weberian colours even more. Veronica Simeoni (Leonor) gives her all to the famous 'O mon Fernand' monologue and makes us cry in her too late *Forza del destino*-like reconciliation in the monastery with her vocally reliable lover Celso Albello. King (Mattia Olivieri) and

Father Superior (Ugo Gualiaro) remain static but handsome and hold their musical line well. **Mike Ashman**

Available to view, free of charge, until September 25 at operavision.com

this year's Cambridge Summer Music Festival. A recital by BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist, bass-baritone Ashley Riches, partnered by pianist Joseph Middleton, this is a song recital themed around night and visions. The repertoire includes songs by Schubert, Gounod, Duparc and Barber, as well as the world premiere of Katie Whitley's settings of poems by Julia Copus, co-commissioned by the festival, the BBC and the Royal Philharmonic Society. If you can't catch it live in Cambridge, it's being recorded by BBC Radio 3 for broadcast on July 10.

**cambridgesummermusic.co.uk,
bbc.co.uk/radio3**

Wigmore Hall, London & online

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch speaks at a specially-programmed concert, July 8

To mark the 73rd anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Wigmore Hall's Director, John Gilhooly, has invited the Holocaust survivor and cellist Anita Lasker-Wallfisch to speak at a specially-programmed concert at Wigmore Hall, to be live-streamed via Wigmore Hall's website, following her recent address to the Bundestag in Berlin. Lasker-Wallfisch survived both Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and will describe her life story and the importance of learning from one of history's darkest chapters. She's joined onstage by her cellist son Raphael Wallfisch, and the pianist John York, for music by Bloch, Ravel and Korngold.

wigmore-hall.org.uk

Royal Albert Hall, London, BBC Radio 3 & BBC Two

First Night of the BBC Proms, July 13

We're not going to be flagging up every Prom this season – you know where to look without our help – but the First Night is certainly worth reminding you of. This finds Sakari Oramo conducting a multi-age line-up of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Proms Youth Ensemble, BBC Symphony Chorus and National Youth Choir of Great Britain, for an evening which begins with Vaughan Williams's *Toward the Unknown Region*, moves on to Holst's *The Planets*, and then closes with the world premiere of Anna Meredith's *Five Telegrams*, which is a co-production with 14-18 NOW and the Edinburgh International Festival. This latter work draws on communications sent by young soldiers in 1918, and it's one particularly worth catching on your television screens, because it features specially-produced digital projections on the side of the Royal Albert Hall, created by 59 Productions.

bbc.co.uk/Proms_2018

Odeonsplatz, Munich & BR-Klassik

Valery Gergiev and David Garrett join forces for an all-Russian programme, July 14

This concert, live-streamed on BR-

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

The Berlin Phil's Chief Conductor-designate whets the appetite for 2019



Dukas · Prokofiev · Schmidt

British audiences have their first opportunity to see (if they're prepared to queue, as seated tickets sold out weeks ago) the Berlin Phil's Chief Conductor-designate Kyrill Petrenko at the BBC Proms on September 1. The programme – Dukas's *La Péri*, Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto (with Yuja Wang) and Franz Schmidt's Fourth Symphony – was unveiled to Berlin audiences on April 13 and the concert is available in the orchestra's Digital Concert Hall.

Judging by the handful of performances Petrenko has given with the BPO, I think we can expect more of this style of programming – not as century-hopping as Rattle's, but just as intriguing with its focus on works from between the two world wars that we really should hear more again. In a fascinating conversation with one of the BPO's cellists, Knut Weber, Petrenko talks about the kind of programmes Furtwängler conducted in Berlin in the 1920s and '30s, and then goes on to drop some

intriguing hints, mentioning Hindemith, Hartmann and this Schmidt symphony, a work that Petrenko clearly adores. He talks about his first encounter with it in Vienna, given by a visiting orchestra and then describes its tight construction as a palindrome (opening and closing with a mournful trumpet solo where, as Petrenko says, quoting Schmidt, 'beauty dies'). It's a work that demands a lot of the players (solos from horn and cello as well as trumpet) and what better orchestra, with its galaxy of star players, to be the medium

to further the work's exposure. Petrenko conducts it with a palpable sense of engagement and emotional kinship.

The opening work, Paul Dukas's tone poem *La Péri*, finds the conductor wreathed in smiles – he simply exudes happiness when he conducts, and he moulds a lovely performance, aided in no small measure by the glorious wind playing of the Berlin Phil. With Yuja Wang as soloist you know exactly what to expect of Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto. It's thrilling: Wang on magnificent form, combining power and delicacy in ideal accord, all linked by her astonishing technique. It's an adrenalin rush from start to finish, with, again, beautifully balanced playing by the orchestra, blending in a way that comes of hours of simply listening to each other. So, if you want to do some homework before that Prom, here's the place to start. **James Jolly**

Available via various subscription packages to the Digital Concert Hall, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at digitalconcerthall.com

Klassik, is the second and final evening of Munich's annual open-air event 'Klassik am Odeonsplatz', so in addition to a promising-looking programme and line-up it should also be a nice view! Valery Gergiev conducts the Munich Philharmonic, first in Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with soloist David Garrett, and then in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*.

klassik-am-odeonsplatz.de, br-klassik.de

Salle des Combins, Verbier & medici.tv

Verbier Festival Opening Concert, July 19

The Verbier Festival turns 25 this year and so there's a celebratory air to proceedings this summer, and even more international names than usual, because it's made a

point of inviting back all its regular artists. Valery Gergiev conducts the Verbier Festival Orchestra for the opening concert, which begins with Rodion Shchedrin's *Diptyque symphonique*, after which comes Saint-Saens's *Introduction et Rondo capriccioso*, Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No 1, Bernstein's 'Glitter and be Gay' from *Candide*, before the evening ends with Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*. Particularly appealing is their choice of soloists too, because they're three of the world's top emerging artists: violinist Daniel Lozakovich, pianist George Li, and soprano Pretty Yende.

verbierfestival.com, medici.tv/en/partners/verbier-festival-on-medicitv/

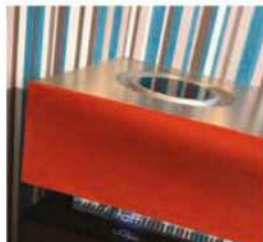
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An innovative British speaker grows up, a little box from Greece to clean up computer audio and how to grab a hi-fi bargain.

Andrew Everard,
Audio Editor

JULY TEST DISCS



This striking recording of Steve Reich's *Drumming* really benefits from the extra detail and dynamics of high-resolution audio.



Sparkling performances make the familiar feel fresh, aided by a gorgeous Channel Classics recording in all formats up to DSD256.

Making the most of streaming

The latest audio arrivals see more ways of streaming, new developments and extra services being added



Things have been very busy in the streaming music world and the big news is the arrival of three new network players in the range from Naim. The British company has rolled out its 'platform for the future' – first seen in its latest Uniti models – to its core hi-fi lines, with new players in its entry-level 5 series, the Classic range and the flagship 500 line-up. Two of the three new arrivals replace existing models, while the range-topping ND 555 **1** moves the company's network offering higher than ever. The company emphasises that while its new platform made its debut in Uniti, it was always built with these models in mind.

That top-end model sells for £12,999, to which one needs add the price of a 555PS power supply at a further £6999 – in fact, the player can be used with two power supplies if you wish! It gains wider-ranging format compatibility, all the way up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD128, and can access streaming services including Tidal and Spotify Connect, as well as having Bluetooth HD, AirPlay and Chromecast Audio built in and being Roon-ready.

As in the now-discontinued NDS, the ND 555 mounts its electronics on heavy metal plates suspended on springs for mechanical isolation, while the newly developed NP800 streaming board is mounted in its own decoupled Faraday cage and the digital-to-analogue converters are also individually screened. Thirteen of the company's DR voltage regulators are

used to power the various sections of the player and a new 450MHz/40-bit SHARC processor is used for buffering, re-clocking, digital filtering and oversampling.

The NDX 2, at £4999, offers the same format handling and streaming services. It has a built-in power supply but this can be bypassed with the use of a XPS or 555PS if required for enhanced performance. Like the ND 555 it has a large colour display, and can be operated using a phone or tablet running the Naim app.

The entry-level ND 5 XS comes in a slimline form to match other 5 Series components and foregoes a display, being purely 'driven' by the app. It still has the same format and services capability but sells for £1999.

Cambridge Audio has added Tidal **2** to its range of network players and receivers via a free firmware update and the latest version of its Cambridge Connect app. The service is now available for the CXN and CXN (V2), CXR120, CXR200, 851N and StreamMagic 6 (V2). The company has also rolled out a new high-end range of hi-fi components. The Edge range comprises a network pre-amp, the £3500 Edge NQ **3**, which is compatible with services including AirPlay, Spotify Connect and Tidal via Chromecast built in, streaming at up to 384kHz/24-bit and DSD256, and also has Bluetooth aptX HD; a matching 100Wpc power amp, the £2500 Edge W; and the Edge A, a £4500 integrated amp also delivering 2x100W. Named for Cambridge

founder Professor Gordon Edge, the new range majors on minimal circuit design to give the cleanest possible signal paths and matches that with a 'ground-up' design to give the products a unique look.

Bluesound, the company behind the BluOS hi-res multiroom system used in its own products and those from stablemate NAD, has launched a new desktop control app for Windows and MacOS X, designed to be used as an alternative to the existing smartphone/tablet apps. The BluOS Controller **4** is said to be clearer, cleaner and smarter than previous versions, with direct access to stored music and other settings.

Talking of apps, now available is the Chord Electronics Go Figure app, allowing direct control of the company's Poly player/streamer, the pocket-size add-on to the Chord Mojo DAC/headphone amp **5**. Installed on a phone or tablet, Go Figure allows the Poly to be set up and operated from a single interface.

Finally this month, Roon has expanded from being a software company to one also selling hardware with the arrival of its Nucleus and Nucleus+ models **6**. Designed to act as a core for any system running the company's innovative music streaming and multiroom system, the Nucleus is based around Intel's miniature NUC computer system and can be used with external hard drives or network stores to feed a whole home of Roon devices. Prices start from £1500. **G**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Neat Iota Xplorer

A new arrival in the British company's Iota range approaches conventional dimensions – but there the 'normal' stops

As a hi-fi reviewer, I'm often asked what speakers I listen to most of the time, and the answer I give is virtually guaranteed to raise eyebrows. You see, I'm not a great fan of hammering out words on a laptop while simultaneously trying to listen to whatever I'm reviewing, which means I have one system for listening, usually featuring a constantly changing roll-call of electronics and speakers, and another I use when I am writing – which seems to be most of the time at the moment!

The little boxes have a sense of scale you wouldn't expect – there's nothing miniature about the way they sound

The speakers in that system, to which I must listen for six hours or more most days, are the original Neat Iotas, the tiny horizontal two-ways from the north-east of England that created such a stir when they were first announced some seven years ago. The little boxes, standing just 13cm tall and 20cm wide, combine a small bass unit and a ribbon tweeter to give a sound not just quite remarkably lucid but also with a sense of scale you wouldn't expect from speakers so compact. There's nothing miniature about the way they play music. And the way they image is another major part of their magic: even in my desk system, and placed no more than a metre from my seat and about the same apart, they deliver a lovely 'out of the box' sound stage with lifelike positioning of the

elements within a recording and none of that 'big headphones' effect.

I also have a pair of the miniature floorstanding Iota Alpha speakers, which relegate the mid/bass driver to mid-range only and have a downwards-firing bass unit in the bottom of their slimline cabinets. They also angle the mid/treble enclosure upwards, allowing them to do the remarkable trick of casting a sonic image apparently hanging above the speakers. The Iota Alphas are one of the speakers I use a lot for reviewing amplifiers and the like, simply because they have an attractive combination of openness and musicality, making it easy to hear what the equipment driving them is doing while also enjoying what's being played.

With all that in mind, I was intrigued – and a little concerned – to hear that Neat was launching a larger version of the concept, the £3500/pr Iota Xplorer. The intrigue was in the ability to scale the speaker up and give an even bigger sound while retaining that seemingly magical imaging; my concern was that, at 74cm tall, the Iota idea was straying dangerously near to conventional speaker size and that at their price the new speakers would be playing with some very big boys of the speaker world.

More conventional the size may be – although most floorstanders are somewhat taller – but the Iota Xplorer still has much to pique the interest. It retains that sloped main enclosure atop a bass module and then adds to it by combining the company's 17cm P1-R3 mid/bass driver and Heil's AMT (Air Motion Transformer) tweeter, again in a sealed box atop the speaker. Unlike



NEAT IOTA XPLORES

Type Floorstanding speakers

Price £3500/pr

Drive units Heil AMT tweeter, 17cm mid/bass, twin 17cm bass drivers

Sensitivity 87dB/1W/1m

Impedance 6 ohms nominal, -5 ohms minimum

Rated frequency response 32Hz-22kHz

Finishes Natural oak, black oak, American walnut, white

Accessories Spikes (supplied), grilles (optional)

Dimensions (HxWxD) 74(+spikes)x45x22cm
neatacoustics.com

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The unusual Neat speakers would be ideal for a compact system, using partners like these ...

NAD C388 AMPLIFIER

The powerful NAD C388 amplifier would work well with the Neats; with the addition of the BluOS module it becomes a streaming solution, too.



NAIM'S UNITI STAR

If you want an all-in-one system to drive the Neats, an excellent choice would be Naim's Uniti Star, complete with network playback and onboard disc-ripping.



conventional voice coil and dome tweeters, the AMT uses a pleated mylar diaphragm bonded to conductive aluminium strips, sitting in a powerful magnetic field. As well as excellent dispersion characteristics it has the advantage of extending the operating range of the driver much lower, for easier integration with the mid-range unit.

Using this driver is an extension of the previous Iota models, which have all used ribbon-type tweeters, and the bass section of the Xplorer employs more thinking from elsewhere in the company's range in the form of Isobaric loading. This technique, used to extract more bass from a given cabinet size, is used in Neat speakers all the way up to the massive Ultimatum XL10 model and comprises a pair of drivers, one behind the other operating in parallel so the volume of air the main driver 'sees' behind it is always constant. The result is that the driver sounds like it's being used in an enclosure twice as large, with obvious results for the bass extension but with the advantage of tight control of the bass as well as extension.

So while the Xplorer has a single downwards-firing Neat P1-R2 driver, similar to the P1-R3 mid-range unit but tuned for bass operation and visible when you look at the speaker from below, behind (or above) it is a second identical P1-R2 within the cabinet. That allows the speaker to deliver impressive bass for its size: the Xplorer may be larger than the other Iota models but it's only 45cm wide and 22cm deep, yet offers bass extension all the way down to 32Hz.

PERFORMANCE

As with all the Iota range, the Xplorer speakers are 'handed' and can be used with the tweeters either inboard or outboard of the mid-bass drivers. In some circumstances, for example if they need to be used wide apart, the inboard position may give a tighter sound-stage image – and indeed this is how I use my little Iotas for close-up listening – but with the Xplorers slightly further from me than the distance between them, I found they worked best with the tweeters outermost and a slight toe-in toward my listening location.

I'd already heard the speakers sounding very impressive on the end of Heed

amplification at this year's Bristol Sound and Vision show – in fact, they were the few exhibits able to make me stay in the room for more than a track or two – but in my own system, whether driven by my usual Naim amplification or more modest integrateds, their performance was even better.

To say that the Xplorers offer all the appeal of the smaller Iotas but on a larger scale may seem simplistic but that's just what they do. There's a freshness and clarity to the sound that's unusual in any speakers, let alone any as compact as this, and the same applies to the conviction and control with which the bass is delivered, making everything from massed strings to powerful orchestral percussion a truly rewarding listen.

There's a freshness and clarity to the sound that's unusual in any speakers, let alone any as compact as this

Whether with the sparkling Rachel Podger/Brecon Baroque recording of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, played in the **NativeDSD.com** DSD256 (!) download on the Marantz ND8006 reviewed last month, or the intertwining rhythms and percussive power of Steve Reich's *Drumming* in 96kHz/24-bit from Qobuz, the Neat speakers are capable of an enthralling performance. True, the treble here is never less than forthright, with not a hint of being smoothed off to give the sound an easy time, and on first acquaintance can seem rather too upfront if you are used to 'relaxed'-sounding speakers. However, provided you don't partner the Xplorers with amplification having a lightweight or forward balance, the result is generous detailing without any brashness or fatigue.

Yes, the sound of these latest Neats isn't what you'd call easy-going, but then these really aren't speakers designed for background listening – instead they're all about commanding your full attention and immersing you in the music. They do it very well indeed, and that's what makes them a fascinating alternative to more conventional designs at their price-level. **G**

Or you could try ...

As mentioned in the main review, the Iota Xplorer speakers are close in price to some very exalted competition. While they've got what it takes to withstand serious consideration, there are more conventional alternatives should that be what you want.

Iota Alpha speakers

However, if you have a reasonably small room, and fancy the look of the Xplorers, it's worth considering their smaller (and much less expensive) brothers, the Iota Alpha speakers. These truly tiny floorstanders may not reach as deep as the Xplorers but they have that magical 'out of the box' sound in evidence across the Iota range, along with surprising power and weight for speakers so small. For more, see **neatacoustics.com**.



Bowers & Wilkins 702 S2 speakers

If you want conventional speakers but still with a twist, the big Bowers & Wilkins 702 S2 model, at a little less than the Xplorers, brings a lot of the technology of the company's flagship 800 series to bear at a lower price point. There's no shortage of bass here, while the combination of the Continuum mid-range driver and the free-breathing pod-mounted carbon-dome tweeter gives the speakers lucid, informative higher frequencies and lovely sound-stage definition. See more at **bowers-wilkins.com**.



Q Acoustics Concept 500 speakers

Arguably the standard-setter in this price-range, the Q Acoustics Concept 500 floorstanders are a winning mix of careful driver design and close attention to the effect of the cabinet on the sound of a speaker. With innovative internal damping and bracing and a five-layer Gelcore construction, the Concept 500 enclosure aims to be as silent as possible, enabling the drive units to be heard at their best – and it works, with a presentation easily the match of more expensive designs. For more details see **qacoustics.co.uk**.



REVIEW IDEON AUDIO 3R USB RENAISSANCE MK2

Good sound comes in a small package

The name may be something of a mouthful, but this little box could just be the most cost-effective addition you can make to a 'computer audio' system

Computer audio is convenient. With little more than a laptop or desktop machine and a suitable digital-to-analogue converter – one with a USB-Type B input, enabling it to be 'seen' by the computer as a sound output device – you can have a high-quality playback system that's more than a match for many a CD player. What's more, it will take you into realms way beyond the capabilities of the CD, opening up the worlds of greater bit-depths and higher sampling rates, both of which promise better detail and dynamics for a clearer view of a recorded performance. The trend has caught on, to the extent that what was once a playback method favoured only by a small number of enthusiasts, sometimes described as the 'Macs and DACs' brigade, has gone mainstream. New DACs without that USB 'computer audio' input are rare, and that square Type B socket is increasingly found on everything from integrated amplifiers to AV receivers.

However, there is a limitation to this kind of computer audio, and that's the USB interface between computer and DAC. USB works, and it will send music just as it does files, pictures, data to printers and so on, but the very universality of the Universal Serial Bus means it was never designed specifically to carry high-quality audio and is prone to all kinds of interference and problems.

The problem with audio is that it happens in real time. Unlike sending data to a printer or copying a document or whatever, there's no time for multiple reads of a file if errors occur due to interference or timing errors between the sending computer and the receiving DAC, both of which have their digital abilities controlled by high-speed timing clocks. And then there's the further problem that USB carries power as well as data – that 5V supply is how you can recharge your phone from your computer – and that's another potential source of interference.

Which is where devices such as the 3R USB Renaissance from the Greek company Ideon Audio come in. This little box, now in its Mk2 form, plugs into the USB line, and uses its internal circuitry to regenerate the USB signal and then re-clock it to give the cleanest possible data to the DAC's USB input. Selling direct from the manufacturer

SPECIFICATION

IDEON AUDIO 3R USB RENAISSANCE MK2

Type USB Reclocker/Regenerator

Price €269 (approx £235)

Inputs USB-Type B, 7.5V DC

Outputs USB-Type A

Accessories supplied Mains adaptor

Dimensions (WxHxD) 5.8x1.7x7.5cm

ideonaudio.com



at €269, plus €22 shipping worldwide – just over £250 at the time of writing – it manages to correct the digital signal and prevent errors and interference from getting through to the DAC. It also disconnects the 5V power-line on the USB connection from the computer, which is a major source of noise, and generates clean power for those DACs usually powered from the computer such as Audioquest's DragonFly models and Meridian's Explorer2.

It can be used at either end of the USB cable, although Ideon says the best effect is heard when it's used just before the DAC. It needs no special drivers to work and is powered by a plug-top power supply, for which a UK three-pin adapter will be needed. You'll also need an extra USB-B-to-USB-A cable to connect the device, which has a USB-A input and outputs to your DAC via a USB-B socket.

And that's it. The 3R has lights for power and USB data reception, and just works, although there is scope for experimentation with the use of different mains supply devices. I tried it with a third-party linear power supply, at a cost of £15 or so, while Ideon Audio sells a rather more ambitious SP-1 power supply unit at €450 (£390) or bundled with the 3R for €600 (about £520), offering a saving of some €120.

PERFORMANCE

I mentioned above that the 3R 'just works' but that significantly understates the effect this little box, which will fit in the palm of your hand, can have on the sound of a digital system. I've been trying it with a variety of DACs, from the USB-powered ones listed above to some very high-end digital hardware I have been listening to of late and in each case the effect has been nothing short of dramatic.

I'm not talking about 'well, it might be a bit better but I'm not sure – let's just say

it sounds different'. Rather, the Ideon unit offers a definite improvement in detail, dynamics and bass control on the kind of level one might expect when moving up from a simple, inexpensive DAC to something rather more sophisticated.

Suddenly even the likes of the Audioquest DragonFly Black – and here we're talking about a device selling for under £100 and crammed into a housing no larger than a USB thumb-drive – sounds big, weighty and very robust, while the effect with already very impressive mains-powered DACs is similarly incremental and just as impressive. It's not just in the improved bass definition and that palpable increase in the sense of air and space around performers, creating a more solid sound-stage picture and furthering the impression of listening to a real event; no, what's most apparent with the 3R in circuit is the timbral quality of instruments and voices, which is simply more explicitly stated and richly delineated, again adding to the realism of the sound.

These effects are noticeable even with relatively low-resolution content, such as internet radio streams, which gain substance and as a result become more involving; but it's with higher-quality content that the 3R's contribution becomes even more apparent, elevating even fairly humble digital conversion equipment to very high levels of performance and realising the potential of higher-resolution files. Switching from the standard power supply to the linear one produced much subtler gains, sufficient to be viewed as icing on the cake rather than a must-have: there was just a shade more sparkle to the most vibrant of recordings. But the effects of the 3R itself requires no such equivocation – if you're serious about computer audio, it should be on your wishlist. **G**

● ESSAY

You can get great value if you know what you're doing

There are bargains to be had out there in used – or pre-loved – hi-fi equipment but you need to make sure of what you're getting, and that it's what it claims to be

Have you always hankered after a Linn LP12 turntable? It's one of those classic pieces of hi-fi; even after more than 40 years it remains both in production and highly covetable. However, just to put things in perspective, that turntable originally launched in 1973 and the current state-of-the-art version, the Linn Klimax LP12, will cost you just under £20,000.

Let's just take a breath and get all that 'yes, the price of a decent car' stuff out of the way, while also acknowledging that the anniversary version, released in 2013 in a limited run of just 40 units to mark four decades of the LP12, was even more expensive at £25,000. And let's also take note that the 'full house' LP12 Klimax is far from being the most expensive turntable on the market, while other parts of a system can also have components – from amplifiers to speakers – costing at least as much, if not considerably more.

What's more, the modular nature of the design means that you can buy the basic version of the turntable, the Majik LP12, for under £3000 and then upgrade it over time to bring it nearer to Klimax LP12 specification as funds allow. That design, and the way the Linn has evolved over the years, opens up another intriguing possibility: one could buy a used example of the turntable from earlier in its history and either upgrade it or have a specialist dealer do the work for you, to bring it up to modern configuration or any of the dozens of stages in between. There are several online sources enabling you to tell from the serial number at what stage of development the product you're looking at was originally sold.

That possibly explains the fact that even quite old versions of the Linn change hands for quite substantial amounts of money – in many cases much more than they cost when new, even for those in some need of work. But that's part of the intrigue of the second-hand market, which can offer some apparent bargains to those wanting to build or improve a system, and not just at the entry level of home audio. Find your way around the fashion-driven world of pre-loved hi-fi and throw in some close study of what you're buying, and it's possible to build a high-end system for a fraction of its original cost.



Linn's range-topping Klimax LP12 turntable may now cost almost £20,000 but with some careful second-hand buying you can build slowly towards it

Fashion-driven? Well, yes. The rules of supply and demand can be seen in action on an exaggerated scale in the used audio market and if you think the prices for which some of those used LP12s change hands are remarkable, you should consider the inflated aspiration of owners of any of the Technics direct-drive turntables. Prices soared when the range was originally discontinued, and then firmed up when it became clear that the revived line-up was also going to be premium-priced. There are still many heavily-used examples – remember these turntables are prized by DJs, from those working every night to bedroom wannabes – for sale with hefty prices on them.

Just about every turntable, however ancient and dusty, seems to bring up pound signs in the eyes of vendors

On the back of that popularity, not only have the online auction sites filled up with all sorts of Technics lookalike models but also any direct-drive turntable seems to have gone up in price – at least in the mind of optimistic vendors. Yes, there are some classics there, but there's also no shortage of budget models from the last heyday of the LP, which are quite possibly best avoided. Add in the fact that the ongoing 'vinyl revival' means just about every turntable – however ancient and dusty when found in an elderly relative's attic – seems to bring up pound signs in the eyes of potential online vendors and it's clear some caution is required when it comes to buying.

However, that fashion-led market can be worked to the advantage of the used

audio buyer, in that CD player prices have certainly softened in the music-streaming age and there are definitely bargains out there. Yes, there are some rather 'punchy' prices – an original early 1980s Philips CD100 for £1150, anyone? – and one should possibly avoid anything advertised as 'vintage', as that seems to load up the price tag; but there's no shortage of good players to be found well on the right side of £100 or so.

You can get great value – if you know what you're doing. If at all possible one should buy relatively locally. That way it's possible to collect in person, hear the product and check everything is working as it should before parting with the money. I should of course also mention that it's not advisable to turn up at an unknown address to meet someone who knows you're carrying bundles of cash.

Less obvious is the need to research what you're buying and not just to get an idea of the prices being commanded. It's also worth checking out how easy an item is to service and whether spare parts are still available. Several readers have contacted me of late wanting to know where to buy major components for long-discontinued products; but when the transport mechanism for a CD player is no longer available, for example, then there are real problems. As one designer said to me of one of his acclaimed machines of the past, 'Yes, there is a Chinese-made copy of the mechanism but I really wouldn't recommend it. It might be better to try to find someone who can fix the original.' Beware, too, of those bargains that seem too good to be true, as it's not unknown for online 'sellers' to use pictures grabbed from other sales to claim they have goods available which don't actually exist.

For all those reasons, you might consider it safer to buy your used hi-fi from a specialist 'pre-loved' retailer. Yes, the prices may be a bit higher – though often open to negotiation – but you'll have some comeback if things go wrong. Such retailers usually offer a limited warranty and should have the wherewithal to check, test, service and indeed demonstrate their goods.

Take your time and buy with your eyes wide open. There's a whole world of bargain audio out there. ⑥



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NOTES & LETTERS

Time for a Debussy debut? • A repeat repeated • Flautist Peter Lloyd remembered

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Smyth's characters



Readers of Neil Fisher's review (May, page 93) of Retrospect Opera's pioneering recording of *The Boatswain's Mate* by Ethel Smyth (left) may be interested that it is not quite correct to suggest that its three principal protagonists are 'rather shopworn: people who know

their best days are behind them'.

The 1915 Universal Edition vocal score describes ex-boatswain Benn as 'the wrong side of forty [sic]'; Travers, the demobilised soldier he befriends, as 'about 35'; and pub landlady Mrs Waters as a mere 28–30! In this light, it does not seem 'a little perverse that three young singers tackle these parts', as Mr Fisher indicates; it is entirely in keeping with their intended characterisation.

Dr Christopher Wiley
Guildford, Surrey

To repeat or not to repeat

In Rob Cowan's 'Replay' column (June, page 103), he notes that Nikolai Sokoloff's 1928 recording of Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony includes the first-movement repeat, commenting this is 'surely a gramophone first'.

In fact, the repeat was observed on recordings made by Landon Ronald in 1923 and '24, by Henry Wood in 1926, and by Eugene Goossens, also in 1926. After Sokoloff's 1928 recording, Stanley Chapple recorded it (c1929) for the Broadcast Twelve label, also observing the repeat.

It's curious that in these early recordings, UK-based conductors observed the repeat, while most outside the UK did not.

Damian Rogan
London

No to photos in concert

The photo that accompanies the review of Lars Vogt's new Beethoven piano concerto recording with the Royal

Letter of the Month

Unheard Debussy

There is a marvellous solo piano piece of Debussy which none of the Complete Works editions has yet included, but which hopefully 2018 may yet see recorded in modern sound. It is the transcription of his 'Fêtes', the second of the orchestral *Nocturnes*, created by the distinguished English pianist and pedagogue Leonard Borwick (1868–1925). Ravel, of course, transcribed the piece for two pianos, and that version was made famous by Rosina and Josef Lhévinne. Other recent duos have since taken it up. But Emil Gilels seems to be the only pianist who recorded (in 1937) the solo version, heard on a Naxos Historical CD.

I encountered the score, published by Jobert of Paris, in a local Oxfam shop and since it's dated 1914, I assume that Debussy, who died in 1918, approved it. Indeed, the wealth of gorgeous melody



Debussy's 'Fêtes' arranged by Borwick – a plea!

and harmony is such as to make it a terrific encore. When even *La mer* has been recorded by a solo pianist (Lydia Jardon on AR Ré-Sé), it seems a pity to ignore this major gem!

Stuart Mitchell
Glasgow

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PRESTO
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Northern Sinfonia (May, page 33) raises a question. The photo has obviously been taken during a live concert with an audience present so I'm left wondering if the capturing of this image caused members of the audience to be disturbed.

In an age where the concert hall is seen less and less as a 'sacred space', I wonder if music lovers are part of the problem in that expecting 'in action' photos leads to an environment where photographers feel that they can disturb audiences in order to obtain them.

Robert Roy
Edinburgh

Box-set frustrations

I was reading the Box-set Round-up in the May issue (page 105), and was excited to see a review of the Emerson Quartet's Complete Recordings on DG – a box-set of 52 CDs. I am a big fan of the Emersons and have a few single CDs of theirs in my collection. After reading the

review I decided to investigate it further with a view to purchasing it as a birthday present to myself in July.

However, I could not find any dealer from whom I could purchase the set at the normal selling price, although a third-party seller online was offering a set for sale for £445! Why review a CD that isn't readily available at the original price?

Howard Edwards
Conwy, Wales

Rob Cowan writes: Regrettably there's no way of ascertaining for sure whether a set will be available at a stated/ reasonable price from day to day let alone from month to month. The rule of supply and demand applies, and when the deletion axe falls, that's a sure cue for the web profiteers to get going – t'was ever thus. But I will do my best to keep abreast of availability. Let's hope that DG will re-press!

OBITUARIES

A great orchestral flautist, a fine mezzo and a hard-working violinist

PETER LLOYD

Flautist

Born September 9, 1931

Died April 15, 2018



The British flautist Peter Lloyd has died at the age of 86. He spent 20 years with the London Symphony Orchestra, having replaced James Galway as

Co-Principal in 1967. He was also a much-loved teacher, most significantly at the Royal Northern College of Music (1993-2012).

Lloyd was born in Dorset and began flute lessons locally before studying at the Royal College of Music with Edward Walker. His first professional playing job was as Second Flute with the (now Royal) Scottish National Orchestra. Inspired by the players around him, he took leave to study in Paris with Fernand Caratgé. On returning to the UK, he came back to the SNO as First Flute and then transferred to the BBC Northern Orchestra (now the BBC Philharmonic) in Manchester, staying there until 1967.

After another spell of studying – first with Geoffrey Gilbert and then in Paris with Jean-Pierre Rampal (he'd later study with Marcel Moyse) – Lloyd joined the LSO, turning down a position with the Hallé to do so.

Lloyd's distinctive tone ('You don't make a sound, you allow it' he would tell his students) can be heard on numerous LSO recordings, including John Williams's film soundtracks, in particular *Star Wars* (many of Williams's flute parts were written with Lloyd's sound in mind, and, indeed, his Flute Concerto of 1969 was written for him).

HUGUETTE TOURANGEAU

Mezzo-soprano

Born August 12, 1938

Died April 21, 2018



The French-Canadian mezzo, who has died aged 79, is best known for her many collaborations with Richard Bonyngue and Dame Joan Sutherland, a partnership that started in

the mid-1960s and included performances or recordings of Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Delibes's *Lakmé*, Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Massenet's *Esclarmonde* and *Thérèse*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Handel's *Rodelinda* and Leoni's *L'Oracolo* ('quite a juicy piece', as she described it in these pages in October 1975). She also recorded Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat*, a collection of arias from forgotten operas and a Massenet song recital with Bonyngue at the piano. Reviewing the latter, *Gramophone*'s vocal authority John Steane wrote that 'Hers is to me one of the most fascinating voices of recent years: a mezzo-soprano of extensive range, with a deep contralto lower register, and a sensuous richness of tone that recalls the voice of Marilyn Horne as it was when we first heard her.'

WANDA WILKOMIRSKA

Violinist

Born January 11, 1929

Died May 1, 2018



The Polish violinist was a champion of new music, giving the premieres of music by Tadeusz Baird and Krzysztof Penderecki among others. After study

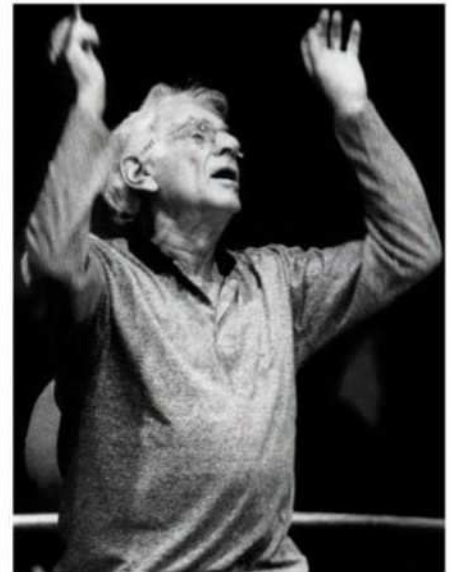
in Łódź and Budapest, she encountered Henryk Szeryng in Paris who asked her to study with him. A succession of competition wins followed, culminating in second place (shared with Julian Sitkovetsky) in the Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition – the first prize went to David Oistrakh.

From the mid-1950s onward, Wilkomirska undertook a punishing schedule of performances, often giving 100 concerts a year, a schedule enlarged when she started to be managed in the US by the legendary Sol Hurok.

She defected to the West in 1982 during the period of martial law, accepting a teaching post first in Mannheim and later in Australia.

She recorded extensively, the bulk of her catalogue – much of it for the New York-based Connoisseur Society – being devoted to chamber music, but it also included the Britten Violin Concerto with the Warsaw PO and Witold Rowicki, as well as the two Szymanowski concertos.

NEXT MONTH
AUGUST 2018



Leonard Bernstein

As the music (and indeed the wider) world marks the centenary of this extraordinary 20th century figure, we explore, across several articles, the various facets of the composer and conductor's life and legacy

Bernstein's Serenade

Based on Plato's Symposium, the composer's 1954 work for solo violin, strings and percussion has fared well on disc – in next month's Collection, David Gutman selects the leading versions to hear and own

Frederic Rzewski

The American composer-pianist, recently turned 80, defies categorisation, though Jed Distler takes up the challenge of capturing his musical world in our Contemporary Composer focus

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Kilar Missa pro pace. Sols/Ch & Orch of Podlasie Op/Błaszczyk.	Ⓕ DUX1413
Krauze Folk Music. Various artists.	Ⓕ ② DUX1435/6
Nowowiejski Org Wks. Karolak.	Ⓕ DUX1416
Nowowiejski Syms Nos 2 & 3. Poznań PO/Borowicz.	Ⓕ DUX1446
Purcell Hpd Stes. Rztecka-Niewiadomska.	Ⓕ DUX1437
Rachmaninov Vespers. Sols/Ch of Podlasie Op/Bielecka.	Ⓕ DUX1404
Various Cpsrs Song of the North - Contemporary Chor Wks. 441Hz Chbr Ch/Wilczewska.	Ⓕ DUX1405
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Paganini Vn Wks. Plotino/Hagen/Mela.	Ⓕ CDS7795
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Biber, HIF & CH Sacred Chor Wks. Conc Stella Matutina/Hämmerle.	Ⓕ FB1710593
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Bruckner Sym No 8. Royal Danish Orch/Haenchen.	Ⓕ GEN18622
Lee Korean Art Song. Lee-Hoff/Schütze.	Ⓕ GEN18602
Menuhin, J Voice of Rebellion - Wks for Pf Duo. Lee-Menuhin/Menuhin, J.	Ⓕ GEN18610
Various Cpsrs When Breath Becomes Sound - Wks for Four Fls. Ens Tetrachord.	Ⓕ GEN18611
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Beethoven Pf Sons Nos 21 & 29. Leone.	Ⓕ 99160
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Sam Lee

The folk singer and song collector on the joy and power of sharing music

I was surrounded by classical music growing up. I remember buying the first Classic FM magazine aged about 10, with a free cassette on the front that had Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 on it, and I played it every night on my little tape machine next to my bed. I was completely transfixed by it. But classical music didn't persevere in that respect, and I very quickly went on to being a little more obsessed with folk music, to hearing and singing folk music with friends around the fire.

There has been a tradition that every few years the BBC Proms has had a folk concert. A few of us will play with the orchestra – I know The Unthanks and myself have both worked with orchestras before, and there is a long history of strings and folk songs. So it just feels like an opportunity to add that sense of elevation to the songs that doesn't often get to happen under the budget of folk music these days. The arrangements that are being used with my piece were all made for a collaboration I did with the City of London Sinfonia a couple of years ago, as part of their Closer series, by Iain Farrington.

Right now I'm in the middle of my Singing with Nightingales project, which involves making music out in the forest with nightingales. I've just come back last night from doing this – we finish at one o'clock in the morning! We go out into the wood to find nightingale habitats. So many classical musicians – Matthew Barley, Viktoria Mullova, members of the Chroma ensemble – have come and played in the darkness, or around the fire, in a thicket, in the most unlikely places. But it's always exquisite being in that space, being so close to the instrument and taking any of the formality away, just letting the grace of the musician shine through.

Viktoria Mullova brought her Stradivarius, unbelievably, into the woods! And she played some Bach, and did a little bit of improvising with the nightingale as well. It was a real pleasure to have her there, in such an unusual and uncertain place. It's always very surprising with Viktoria – she's one of the greatest musicians alive, but to see her so vulnerable in that place, being in the darkness, and being beholden to the musical power of a bird that's only about five feet away from you, singing at high volume. You suddenly lose those inhibitions, and none of the exposure, or exposed-ness, of being on stage exists – suddenly you're free, and she, like many classical musicians, really appreciates that.

I wholly advocate this idea that music is great wherever it's played and however it's played – it's just about giving the audience the opportunity to not compartmentalise and draw assumptions and conclusions. For me, one of the greatest pleasures as a musician is being able to present the music that I love to make in such a way that the audience has little expectation of what it is. I think it's the duty of music-makers



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The first movement is the jewel in the crown of this work. Marlui Miranda sits in that incredible realm between opera and traditional tribal song.

today to both knock down those barriers as well as honour them at the same time, because one should never take down a fence without knowing why it was put up, as I always say. But I think that importance of musical trespass is so vital for keeping creativity going.

And for me it's not always about what's being played, but the presentation of it. I love it when classical musicians talk and tell stories around their music and give a sense of accessibility through their passion for it. I think something that's very hard for a lot of people to understand is 'why is that musician in love with this music, why have they devoted their life to making it?'. Once that can be revealed, often on very simply personal levels, I think that's always a great privilege.

The record I've chosen is by Marlui Miranda, a Brazilian composer of indigenous descent who has gone about collecting a lot of traditional Quechua, Brazilian and Amazonian songs and then arranged them for classical choir and orchestra. This piece is one of her great commissions, and it's the most wonderful symphonic interpretation of traditional music. I see it as the kind of *Lark Ascending* of Brazil in that respect. **G**

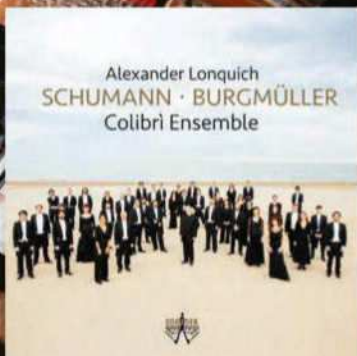
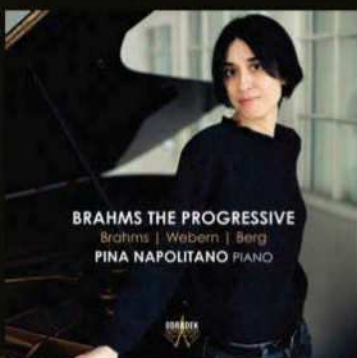
Sam Lee performs in 'Folk Music around Britain and Ireland' on August 3, part of the BBC Proms at London's Royal Albert Hall; hear it on BBC Radio 3

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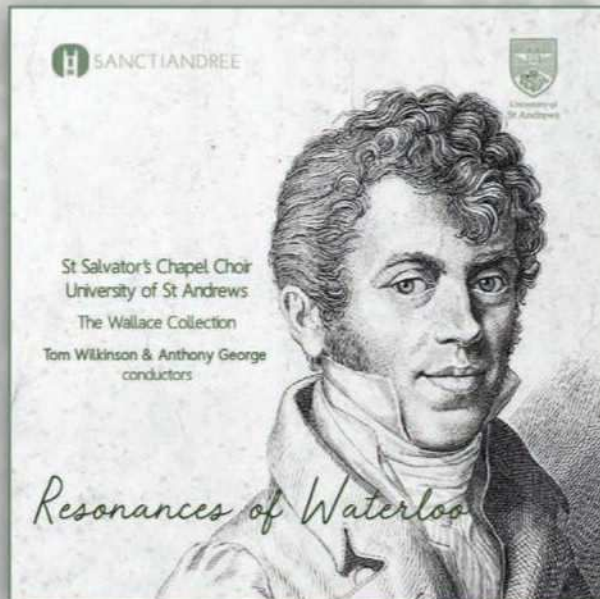
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